

214690

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_214690

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No.

Accession No.

Author

Title

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below.

IN PRAISE OF FRANCE

By the Same Author

COLLECTED POEMS

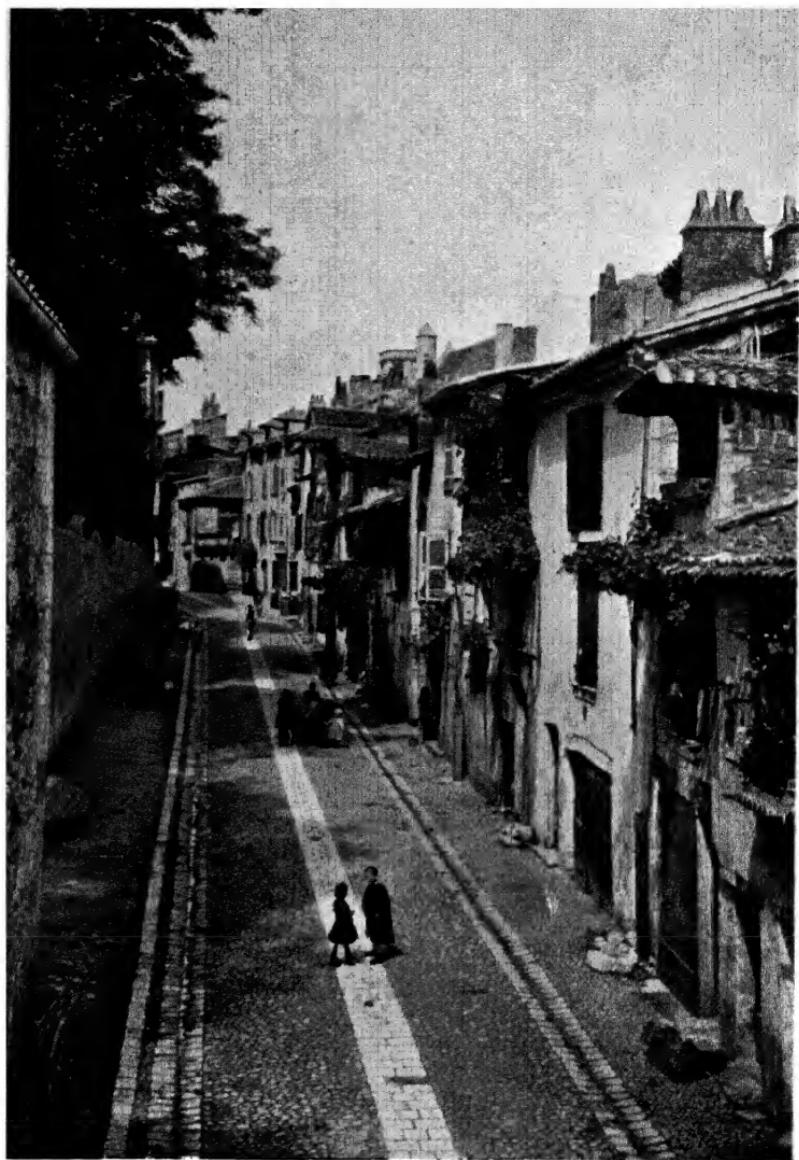
THE MASTERS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

EXPERIENCES OF A LITERARY MAN

DUFFER'S LUCK : A FISHERMAN'S ADVENTURES

GARDEN WISDOM : A BOOK OF MEMORIES

FOR SECOND READING : ATTEMPTS TO PLEASE



Levy and Neurdein, Paris

PÉRIGUEUX : RUE DU LYS

IN PRAISE OF FRANCE

BY

STEPHEN GWYNN



London
NISBET & CO. LTD.
22 BERNERS STREET, W.1

First Published in 1927

*Printed in Great Britain
by The Whitefriars Press, Ltd., London and Tonbridge,*

TO
MONSIEUR AND MADAME
ABEL CHEVALLEY
AND TO
MONSIEUR AND MADAME
ALEXANDRE LEFAS
WITH GRATITUDE
FOR MUCH KINDNESS

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	xii
I.	THE YONNE TO THE LOIRE	i
II.	ST. MÂLO TO ANGERS	29
III.	MONTREUIL-SUR-MER	59
IV.	MARTIN EGLISE AND ARQUES	71
V.	IN BRILLAT-SAVARIN'S COUNTRY	99
VI.	GISORS	139
VII.	IN THE MIDI	149
VIII.	THE CLASSICS OF THE TABLE	191
IX.	IN POITOU AND PÉRIGORD	220
X.	VINTAGE TIME IN BORDEAUX	249

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing Page</i>
PÉRIGUEUX : RUE DU LYS	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MY FIRST FRIENDS IN FRANCE—M. AND MME. CREMIÈRE	xii
THE GREAT CHURCH AT VÉZELAY	8
CHÂTEAU DE LA CÔTE, CHANCAY	20
TAPESTRIES AT ANGERS	46
LE MANS CATHEDRAL	56
MONTREUIL-SUR-MER : MARKET PLACE	68
THE CLOS NORMAND	82
OLD HOUSE AT BOURG-EN-BRESSE	104
THE CHÂTEAU OF GISORS	136
TOULON : LA VIEILLE DARSE	162
THE MEDITATIONS OF A GOURMAND	200
ST. SAVIN FROM THE GARTEMPE	224
MURAL PAINTING AT ST. SAVIN	230
STONE STAIRCASE AT PÉRIGUEUX	240
PORTE ROYALE IN THE CATHEDRAL, BORDEAUX	282

INTRODUCTION

THIS book has been a long time growing. From the spring of 1922 to the autumn of 1926, as opportunity offered, I gathered my vagrant impressions—but with a central purpose. If these were only a collection of holiday notes, the title would be an impertinence : but they are, I hope, more. Anyhow, to me they are a profession of allegiance : an attempt to express something of my feeling about France. If they help anyone to find places for holiday-making, so much the better : but they are written for those who, like me, are in love with France, and will like to hear France praised.

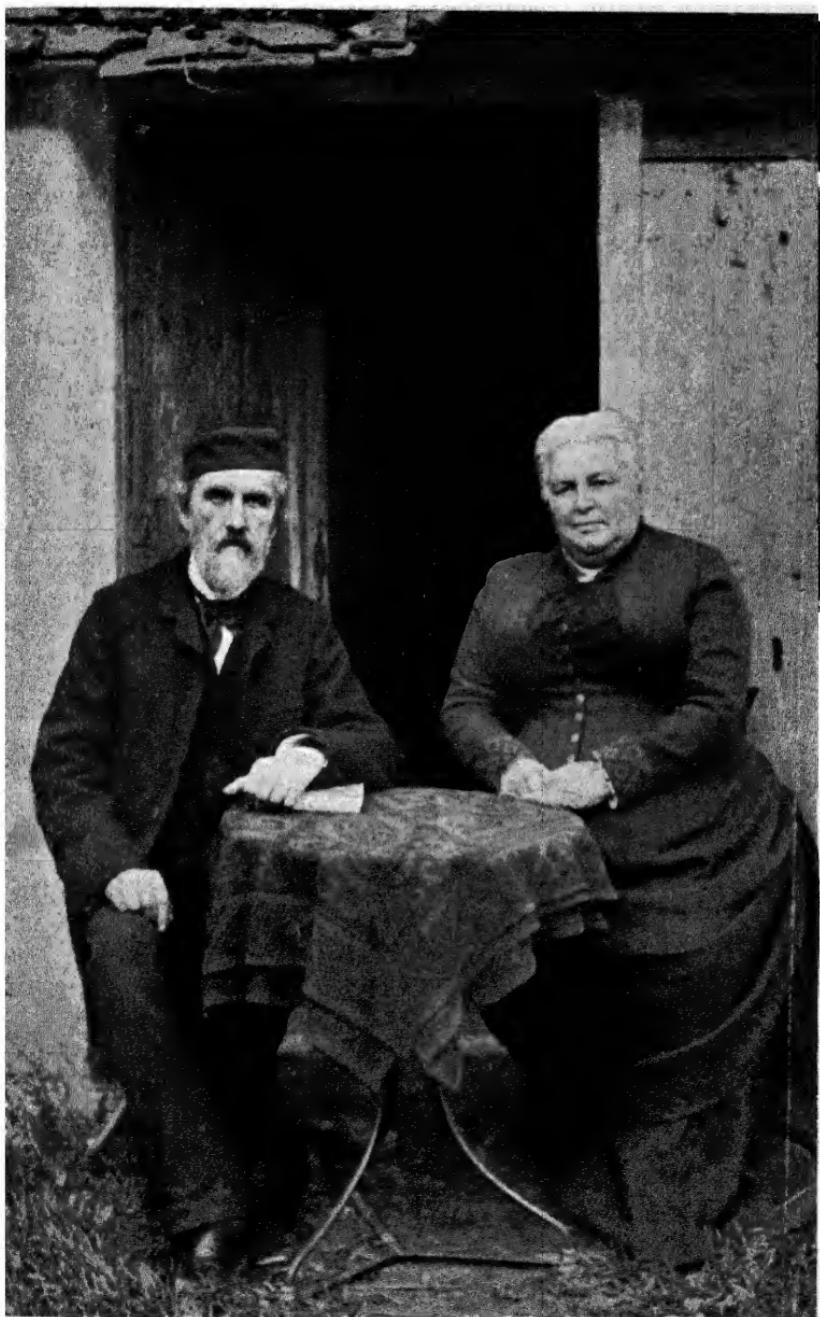
Every country discloses itself in many manifestations, and none offers more variety than this borderland between Alps and Pyrenees, Channel and Mediterranean. Yet in all Europe no people is more definitely one than the French. Whatever place I have reached has yielded a typical impression of France ; and I did not wander quite at haphazard but with the idea of making a choice of subjects at least fairly representative of the whole. Only one region I deliberately left out—

Introduction

the battle zone. And yet it was there that thousands of us came to understand France best : and we judge in the light of those memories even what seems most remote from them.

But the beginnings of this book really go back far beyond any recent studies—far beyond the war. I fell in love with France just when I left Oxford : and of course it was not only France I fell in love with. Good reason I have to bless the young lady whom for certain months I thought so cruel, for her tuition had brought me to a point when I found it quite easy to frame my reproaches in French. Probably, indeed, I found enjoyment in this literary exercise, though I would have died sooner than admit it.

But even when most busy with the special affairs of youth, one could not be stupid enough to miss the charm of the old couple whose guests we were, at the little *propriété*, with its four or five vine-bearing acres sloping down to the great dusty road which runs along the Loire by St. Cyr. Our host had been an ironmaster on the small scale, but retired, as the French do, when circumstances enabled him, to enjoy a period of leisure. After they had married off their only son, since the niece who was a kind of daughter could only spend half the week with them, their house seemed empty ; and so they began to take in pensionnaires—and pamper them. How we ate



MY FIRST FRIENDS IN FRANCE
M. and Mme. Cremière

and drank (of their own good wine)—for ten francs a day ! I shall never forget Madame in her little ramshackle phæton, starting out of a morning for Tours to do her shopping. Yet an even more characteristic snapshot of memory shows her at table. She was short but voluminous. “ I used to be slim, like my niece there,” she would say, “ but M. Cremière has treated me so well that I am grown into a monument to his goodness.” In carving a goose, since the amplitude of her figure did not permit close approach to the table, she would simply take the bird in its dish on her lap.

Monsieur, of course, never touched the carving : I cannot remember that he ever did anything about the house—though no doubt all that pertained to wine and to the vineyard was his province. But I never met a better talker. He stands first of a long line of instances who convinced me that of all European countries France produces the most charming old men. The type is portrayed once and for all in Besnard’s portrait at the Luxembourg, which shows the painter Harpignies, palette in hand, turning to peer at you over his glasses. Such another small, slight-built, finely-finished creature, in such another shiny black alpaca jacket, was our old friend at La Gruette ; and long after he was dead I met one who might have been his twin brother.

Introduction

That was at Marles-les-Mines when we were on the march back to rest billets. He was a clerk in the mines : his son, a working miner (there were nine others, all in the army), came in wearing dungarees : the wife, a silent old body, padded about, while the head of the house sat there discussing European affairs and the war in general with the finish and command that might have been expected from an ambassador. Such Frenchmen are not deeply read, but there is no dead knowledge in their minds : all has been digested and vitalised by the constant play of their supple and disciplined intelligence.

Over and above the master and mistress, we learnt in those far-off days at La Gruette to admire French household life. None of us young men could help noticing that one woman, who did the cooking superbly, also looked after the whole establishment, willingly and with zest. Now and then another, really a farm hand, helped with the heavy work. Her ill-assorted name was Célestine, and one realised from her how rough-hewn a creature the French peasant woman often is—how little removed from the squaw. But Valentine, the *bonne*, had all the grace of speech and manner which belongs to Touraine : busy as a bee, she was never too busy to be friendly. We understood, too, I think, that she was more a member of the family and less a servant than any

we had known—even than I had known in an Irish home.

People are saying that service in France is not what it was. Well, the confidential waiter has no doubt been largely displaced by the waitress, who can never replace him. Women can cook : there have been women chefs renowned in the annals of gastronomy. But those fine qualities of appreciation, the power to enjoy others' enjoyment of good cheer, which I found lately, for instance, in a twinkling, middle-aged waiter at Angers, have no feminine counterpart. That type of waiter is rare in France to-day : in Paris of old it abounded. The American contact seems to have been fatal to this as to many other things characteristic and charming. But the type of *bonne*, of whom Valentine is my archetype, is still numerous as the vineyards in France—and more widely distributed. When I was laid up in a busy little Norman hotel, the girl who looked after my room might have been a younger cousin of Valentine ; and more I could not say for any domestic.

Another figure stands out from my early memories, hardly less characteristic of the life of France : one of those born monks, austere, laborious and devoted, who are lay monks none the less even when they happen to be anti-clerical. But this old professor at Tours—at least he seemed old in those days—to whom the

Introduction

more ambitious of us were sent for lessons in composition, was, in his own phrase, *Catholique militant*. M. Messire, however, did not talk much to me about politics, but a great deal about literature : he interested himself in what I wrote, not simply as an exercise in grammar : he taught me, I think, something of the French love for clear and orderly exposition ; and he was the first, indeed the only, person who ever counselled me to become a writer. Whether I should make a living or no was not a question that he discussed or alluded to : he simply came to the conclusion that I had a faculty and ought to use it, and did not spare to press his advice. That seems to me very characteristic of a Frenchman, in the respect which it implies for things of the mind.

After that early experience, a couple of stray visits gave me all I saw of France during more than twenty years : but none the less France coloured all my life. It has always been so with those who, when they read for pleasure, read by preference in French. No other literature is so free of all frontiers.

One crisis in that period revealed to me, and to those for whom I write, the quality of our feeling. Whether we thought France justly or unjustly accused of injustice in the Dreyfus affair, we were moved as seemed hardly credible by the trouble of a country not our own.

Introduction

Yet we should all have lived and died and never known the strength of this attachment but for the war ; and then we had our reward. We went joyfully because we went (for what we were worth) to the help of France : and some of us at least felt that we acquired a kind of citizenship. At all events, after the war, when I wanted to visit France, it seemed to me perfectly natural to say to two Frenchmen with whom I had made friends that I hoped not to come entirely as a foreigner. I had my answer. French doors do not open readily, but they open with a will. Nowhere else have I ever met such hospitality as then and thereafter in France ; and one illustration I shall give. Our home in Ireland met with an accident, such as was then frequent among us, and we received many letters of sympathy. But from these two households in France the letters brought the offer of a house to live in till ours should be restored. I like to think that these two sets of people, unknown to each other and differing in all their associations and outlook, had the same impulse, and, recognising the affection to their country which is felt outside its borders, were glad when the occasion offered to treat the stranger who felt it as if he were their own kin.

I have written their names together in my dedication. They will not quarrel with me if I speak of these sketches as an interpretation of

Introduction

France ; for all praise in literature is the attempt to interpret, for oneself first and then for who chooses to listen, the quality of some excellence. The book is nothing more serious than a record of enjoyment ; but they will know that to enjoy is the best way to understand. And if in many cases the particular excellence of which I translate my enjoyment is one of France's wines or France's dishes, why, being French, they will see in that at least some proof of intelligent appreciation.

There are a few more words to add. It is a fact that in my various wanderings I can scarcely recall meeting or seeing one English-speaking person anywhere more than ten miles from the sea. The Loire country is of course an exception : but how easily one slips from Tours or Amboise into the adorable valley of the Brenne ! And so far as I have been able to gather by conversation, the number of English people who know even such famous places as Poitiers, Angers or Périgueux is small indeed. These lie off the beaten track, which I shunned. Yet even some places like Toulon, right on the highway to resorts where people dress for dinner and have golf, and English clubs, and all those desirable accessories which it has been my endeavour to avoid, seem to be strangely neglected : and if I send even a couple of travellers to spend even a couple of hours on a sunny day by the Vieille Darse, I shall earn some gratitude. And,

twenty miles off, there is Collobrières,—which might almost rank as a discovery.

But the truth is that in France there is nothing to discover from the point of view of the instructed: everything has been noted, classified and admirably written about—even Collobrières ; yet the imperfectly instructed—which, thank God, means most of us—can be happily making discoveries all the time. Travelling in France, to those for whom I write, is like falling in love—the greatest of all voyages of discovery.

For those who are fortunate enough—if indeed it is good fortune, of which I am not sure—to do their exploration by motor, I make a few suggestions. These all involve the assumption that this book will present itself as a desirable companion of travel : but perhaps that is no more lacking in modesty than to write at all.

Anyhow, if you take your motor to Boulogne, Montreuil is a first halt ; and from there you can run west and coastwise to Dieppe, where Martin Eglise and Arques always attract me. The angler will find many attractive little rivers about here, and the best way to know if they are free is to try fishing them.

From Dieppe to Paris you have Gisors on the direct line—and more little rivers. But if your object is to explore Normandy, you may hold along the coast and make discoveries even at Caen

Introduction

and Bayeux and in the Bessin, and then follow the Valley of the Orne to Falaise and so make your way to Domfront and the *Suisse Normande*. Here again you may turn to Paris by way of Chartres, as I hoped to do and did not ; or keeping west still may visit Mont St. Michel and then pick up at Dol the route of one of my most delightful wanderings—through Rennes and Fou-gères and Vitré to Le Mans, and from Le Mans to Angers.

Once at Angers, when you decide to leave that enchanting city, you can turn back along the Valley of the Loire, by Tours (and Vouvray if you are wise) and Amboise, Blois, and Orleans, and so to Paris.

Or again, from Angers you may push on south, from Henry II.'s inheritance of Anjou, through Eleanor's greater dowry Aquitaine. Poitou and Périgord and Gascony will take you to Bordeaux and the bay of Arcachon—beyond which all is to me still unexplored, but, please Heaven, shall not be long so. It may be only that south-western France is freshest in my memory, but nothing else at this moment tempts me quite so much.

Yet in the Morvan, where these wanderings began, and beyond Burgundy proper, on the fringes of Savoy, is a land of delight. Get to Avallon and Vézelay how you will ; but get there ; and take Auxerre on the way if you can. Dijon

Introduction

is to the east of you, and you may explore it on the way to Bourg-en-Bresse, next door to Brillat-Savarins' country of Bugey and Valromey—where you eat better than anywhere else in France.

Then you are in the Rhone valley, and I envy anyone, motorist or not, who can track it down to Lyons (and la Mère Fillioux's restaurant, which I trust preserves her great tradition), and so to the Mediterranean shore and Marseilles and Toulon and the Mountains of the Moors. Here again, you reach my limit ; east or west, I stop short of the golf links.

A word or two of acknowledgment should be added. Up and down these pages will be found references to MM. Rouff and Curnonsky's *La France Gastronomique*—of which an English translation is now appearing. Whether you take my book or no, I strongly advise you to take theirs : it adds greatly to the fun of travel. The French edition is in a number of tiny pocketable volumes. Further, I imagine that any cyclist or motorist will be well advised to pay the small subscription which confers membership of the Touring Club de France. But all and sundry can profit by the recommendations posted up over hotels—simply the letters “T.C.F.” ; and the organisation in Paris supplies information of all kinds from its bureau at 67, Boulevard des Grandes Armées. Here also they have a collection of photographs at very low

Introduction

prices, some of which I have been permitted to reproduce.

At the Archives Photographiques in the Palais Royal is another collection, admirably catalogued, slightly more expensive, but just about as good as photographs can be. Some of them also are among my illustrations.

Lastly, at every considerable centre, there is a Société d'Initiative. The value of these institutions varies according to the person in charge : but you may be fortunate enough to light on so cultivated and charming a Frenchman as M. Guibon at Dieppe : and in every case it is well worth trying.

IN PRAISE OF FRANCE

I

THE YONNE TO THE LOIRE

OF all things in this world, I most hate to be a tourist. The tourist is one who knows in a country the hotels and railway carriages ; after that, the churches, the picture galleries, the places of interest or beauty which other tourists have discovered. What he does not know, and does not care to know, is the people, the life. Yet nowadays it is hard not to be a tourist. In civilised lands your only modern traveller is the bagman, for he must conform to the useful example of Ulysses, who not only saw many cities but knew their minds. A very ordinary Englishman “travelling” in footballs, tennis rackets, and other articles of sport, told me more illuminating facts about the city of Prague than the highly cultivated persons who have raved of its picturesqueness. It was much more interesting to know that both Czech and Slovak played tennis but kept to their own clubs, and that neither must know that you were supplying to the other.

In Praise of France

But we cannot all be bagmen, and we have not the advantages of the eighteenth century, when it was easy for a stranger to form acquaintance wherever he went, because he brought news. Nowadays, the French, like ourselves, have their specialised agencies for supplying information, and their newspapers tell their readers exactly as much about the real life of these islands as do ours about the life of France. Leave out the war, which brought us pretty close, and no two countries in Europe know less about each other ; newspapers prevent us from realising the dangerous depth of our mutual ignorance. And yet the Frenchman and the Englishman, Scot, or Irishman can exchange invaluable knowledge most agreeably if they make friends. But how to do that ? I certainly for one can never manage it by coming into a strange place, looking about me, and asking questions, which is the approved procedure of a tourist's first cousin, the special correspondent.

Then it occurred to me that France has trout streams, as many soldiers discovered in the war ; and fishing is a great freemasonry.

When all these considerations were explained to a lady by whom it was my good fortune to sit at a Christmastime dinner in Paris, she approved, and named to me rivers in Normandy and Brittany. Cider countries, I said ; a good half of the charm of France lies in the local wine : there must be

The Yonne to the Loire

vines as well as trout in the place of my pilgrimage. Then, she answered, you should go to the Avallonnais.

I own without shame that this conveyed nothing to me, for many French people seem to be little more acquainted with the name. Yet I find that English-speaking folk, and many fishermen among them, have been coming there for generations—wise people. Many also pass through in motor-cars, and these probably would tell you that they know Avallon. Not they. A town of 5,000 prosperous inhabitants with a great part of its buildings some 500 years old is not to be known in a morning or an afternoon.

For mere sight-seeing in Avallon, and still more in the district, you must take time ; there are no general effects, but a bewildering delight of detail. It is a country of surprises ; but the surprise of all to me was that little more than a hundred miles from Paris places should exist as wild as anything in the Black Forest. It is true these hundred miles or so as the crow flies mean eight hours by rail. But the journey has this for it, that you follow river valleys all the way : first, along the Seine to Montereau, where the Yonne joins it from the south, a river as big as the Thames at Henley ; then along the Yonne, with its vine-growing slopes, past Joigny and Auxerre till you reach the railway junction of Cravant and the

In Praise of France

valley of the Cure. The Cure is the chief river of the Avallonnais, and, so far as one can judge of a flooded stream, it ranks with the Test for size. But Avallon itself stands on, or rather over, the Cousin, a much smaller stream, which joins the Cure at Sermizelles ; and for some miles we travelled within a short distance of it, I wondering meanwhile how a fly was to be thrown between those close ranks of poplar or hazel.

And it had to be fly fishing or nothing. When I got to Paris at the end of April, with rod and tackle, my friends all said that they were sorry for me, but fish I could not. *La pêche était fermée*. Every human being knew that the close season ran from April to June ; naturally, for fishing is a national institution in France, where all river banks, even the quays in Paris, are lined with happy anglers, and no one can fail to note their seasonal disappearance. I argued, however, that since trout do not spawn in spring, French law must take account of this natural fact. Yet so little in France does the idea of *la pêche* comprise the idea of trout fishing that no one knew of any such exception, till at last I found a fishing-tackle shop and was confirmed. So, after all, we did not give up our expedition to Burgundy. Persistence has its rewards.

When at last we left the valley of the Cousin, the railway wound up and up, and we saw many

The Yonne to the Loire

villages, where every house had charm of colour or quaint line, but no sign of a town. The track was running among the high uplands, through which in part of its course the Cousin has cut a narrow gorge 300 or 400 feet deep. Even at its railway station, Avallon was still out of sight, between us and this cliff edge. Nearly half a mile of pleasant suburban roadway had to be travelled, between quite modern houses ; but at the end of it the Mall with its elms was bordered by eighteenth-century architecture ; and the Chapeau Rouge, to which we were recommended, was an old-fashioned rambling hostelry, too big to be called an inn, too friendly and informal for the frigid name of hotel. Its proprietor, a family friend of the distinguished publicist whose wife directed us to Avallon, was a sportsman himself, and told me where to fish ; but first we had to see the town. One minute's walk and we were in the fifteenth century. The town had been built, for defensive reasons, on the very edge of the cliff between two small ravines which run at sharp angles into the main gorge, so that on three sides the ground falls almost precipitously ; a natural stronghold, elaborately strengthened, and no wonder : it was Vauban's home, it was the centre of the district which that very great and wise soldier loved best ; and his statue is there, dominating a terrace to which the town as it were juts

In Praise of France

out ; his bastions and works survive, as well as one of the broken gates through which the wall on the accessible side was entered. Buildings of more recent date, two superb convents, probably of the *grand siècle*, had their place near the old and beautiful fifteenth-century church, among houses not less old than it ; but all the transitions were harmonious : there was no brusque interposition of the modern, and the old where it stood was nowhere dilapidated. The whole was as picturesque as Nuremberg ; and, as at Nuremberg, life in it was vigorous, maintaining the strong continuity of half a thousand years.

I left my Younger Generation to sleep off her fatigue at the Chapeau Rouge while I went fishing. The road slanted down one of the side defiles, then turned at an angle, and I saw Avallon up against the sky, with the two convents and the church silhouetted, and the ring of wall still complete on this side. Up to the wall was carried an intricate work of terracing with steep paths between gardens, and in every garden the citizens of Avallon—most of whom are small *rentiers*, retired captains and the like—were pricking out their lettuces. At the bottom was the river, harnessed to drive the plant of half a dozen factories, tanning works, with great stacks of oak saplings piled in them. Up the valley, where the road got finally clear of houses, the gorge turned,

The Yonne to the Loire

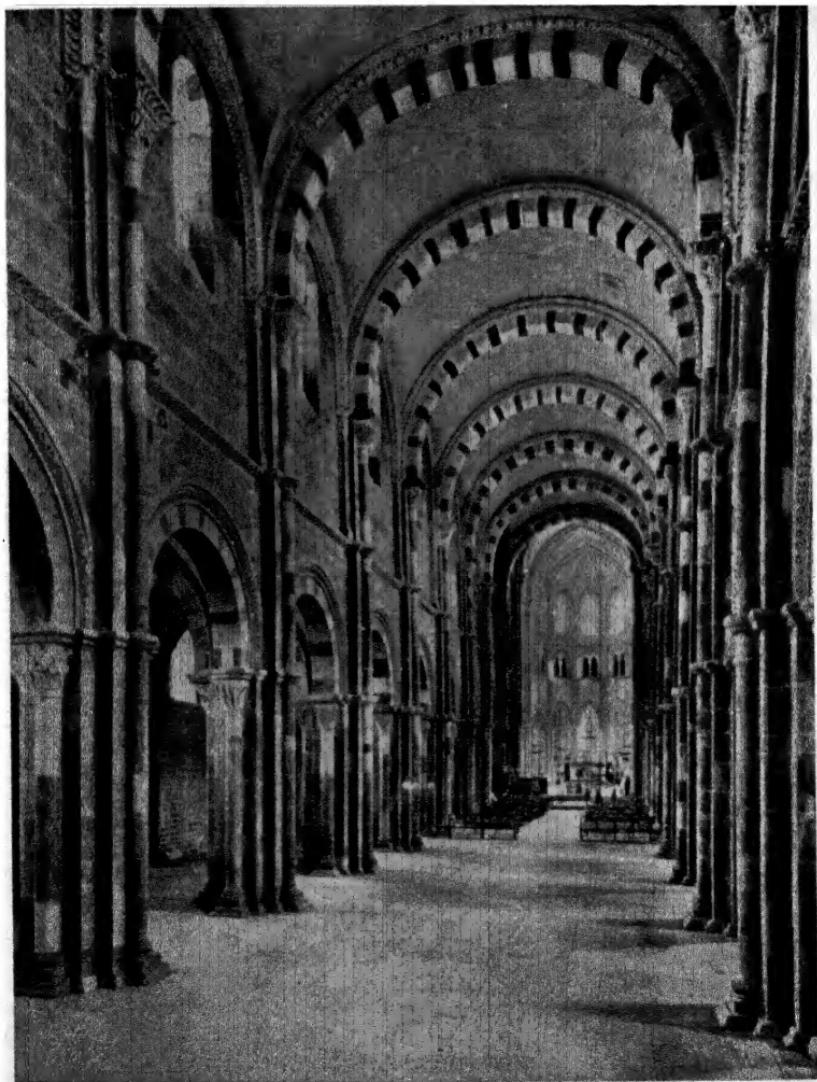
and steep above me ran a great cliff of mingled wooding, lit with the flames of spring ; and through the green and silver-grey and olive were many cherry trees in blossom, shell-white and diaphanous, most aerial of all flowering things. Broom was bright too on the slopes, and I walked along in a maze of beauty and strangeness ; for the gorge narrowed still closer, crags of granite stood out fantastically from the trees, giant rocks were tumbled in heaps : a *Salvator Rosa* country in the very heart of France. Four great buzzards completed the wildness, wheeling overhead about the topmost belt of pine, their square wings making them exactly like aeroplanes—the most simplified bird that flies. At the entrance to this reach of the valley there was as beautiful a mill as ever delighted eyes ; its roof of murrey-coloured tiles was weathered to an exquisite brown, just as its harmonious lines were by time faintly sagged, its angles slightly blunted, till the whole had acquired a rhythm, as if it had grown rather than been made. Swift running water was on each side of it, and beyond the water tall feathery poplars, France's favourite tree, shot up, dressed in the airy golden green of their young leafage.

That day was only an exploration, for the Cousin was in spate, running white—not yellow as with us ; and fly fishing was absurd. But except for one field I saw no place in more than a

In Praise of France

mile of river where on either bank you could throw three casts in succession. When I got back my host's son, a young officer, St. Cyr trained, and back on leave from Germany, said that he would take us farther upstream to the real fishing grounds. We drove with him accordingly next day over the high ground on the road to Paris, then down by a zigzag into the valley. We left the car at a mill, and plunged into a path through thick hazels, where finally, just above a rough wooden bridge, our guide pointed to a series of plunging cascades—undoubtedly a likely spot for the worm ; but the worm was forbidden, and no fish could see a fly in that turmoil, if there had been room to throw one.

I need not describe a blank afternoon, for which I was consoled by hearing that the best local fisher had the same result a day before. The flood was too high, but a lovelier mountain stream it would be impossible to imagine. I got my fly over many likely spots ; but to fish it after our fashion you would need thigh waders to walk upstream, and even then casting would be difficult. The French work it from the bank, using the caddis-worm, or some large natural fly, poking out the rod through bushes as best they can, and when they cannot cast, drawing it to a loop, so that it shoots out the line—like an arbalest, as our young officer said. In that way you may get a couple of dozen herring-



Archives Photographiques

THE GREAT CHURCH AT VÉZELAY

sized fish—pink and well flavoured, as I verified next morning when I caught and ate my only French trout.

But when I go back to that country for a serious fishing holiday it will be rather to the Cure, a bigger river, with larger trout to fish for, between less obstructed banks, and a place of even greater interest than Avallon dominating the valley. I console myself by thinking that if the Cousin had been in fishing order we should never have gone to Vézelay.

When Christianity was beginning to be re-established in what had been Roman Gaul, and when the modern France was evolving, monks established themselves in the lowlands by the Cure where it ceases to be a mountain torrent. Two or three centuries later, the Norsemen, pushing up the Seine and the Yonne, followed up this side valley also, found and sacked the monastery. The same thing happened about the same time in scores of places in Ireland ; and the Irish monks met the situation by building tall round towers, into which they could shift their more precious belongings and themselves when an alarm came. But the monks of Vézelay had Roman ideas, and they moved back from the river bank (where is now the village of St. Père) to the top of a high detached hummocky hill which rises like a beacon ; and they built walls about

In Praise of France

themselves, formidable walls : they made a town, from which they went out to cultivate. They were a strong community, who fought whoever sought to interfere with them ; and as the feudal system developed, they made themselves recognised and respected as feudal lords. Vézelay ended by having 15,000 people within the circuit of its walls ; and its church, which began as a small building of the Roman type, ended as an eleventh-century edifice, exactly the same length as Notre Dame. It looks a great deal longer, because of its greater severity, its absence of ornament. I can recall nothing more beautiful than the long recession of those high round arches—with the round flattened out in many places by the weight of the towers. There is interesting primitive sculpture too in the capitals—exactly like what the modern sculptor is trying to do to-day, and not doing it.

The church is a national monument, and Viollet le Duc spent fifteen years restoring it. It is used for service still, but in winter the congregation go into a little room or chapel opening off the cloister : Vézelay now numbers some 450 inhabitants, and by no means all are churchgoers. Its interest differs from that of Avallon as the dead from the living. When the motor bus from Sermizelles dropped us at the rather primitive little hotel in the place outside the walls, the

The Yonne to the Loire

Younger Generation and I decided that we should find our *déjeuner* somewhere near the church ; and we walked through imposing streets of very old but perfectly solid houses, seeing no one. We surveyed the church, and the little square outside it, where was one silent café, with a depressed patronne, from whom we learnt that the hotel was unique, and our only chance of a meal.

So back we went, winding our way through narrow mediæval laneways—still meeting neither cat nor dog nor human. It was a day of blazing sun and the hour of midday food ; yet even so the solitude was uncanny, rendered more haunting by the black depths of cellars cut deep into the rock from the footway, some of which seemed to be habitations. However, this rough little hotel, in a rough little room, had an excellent table for us, at which already were seated two professorial-looking gentlemen, and another whom we learnt afterwards to be a buyer of wool. All three were discussing the antiquities of the place, and the wool-buyer was the best informed. He said a great deal that was interesting, and said it with the finish of a perfectly educated man, before he went off to his business and left us and the other pilgrims to make friends. *Déjeuner* in a French country town is always a long business, but we were glad of its length ; and after it we saw Vézelay in the profitable company of two pleasant French-

In Praise of France

men who knew their history. They took us first, skirting the wall from the outside, to the place where St. Bernard preached the second Crusade, with King Louis VII. on a platform beside him, looking out over the valley and over the multitude which crowded about them and clamoured for crosses till the saint and his company were forced to tear their robes in strips and knot them into emblems. Eleanor of Aquitaine was there with the king ; she had not yet divorced him to marry Henry II. of England. Here too at Vézelay forty years later her son, Richard Cœur de Lion, trysted with a later Louis when the third Crusade was launched. Vézelay was a natural rendezvous, standing on the confines of France, Burgundy, and what was then England in France. Its little ring of walls must have been crowded with a vengeance when it held 15,000 souls. No wonder they had plague in those days, for the water supply is only a recent acquisition, celebrated by a stone inscription.

As a monument it would be hard to imagine anything of more interest than this town, now become a village, yet kept decent and even stately by national care. But that little apartment off Viollet le Duc's cloister gave me a cruel picture of the congregation, and what it must look like in the vast church. It was very different at St. Père down by the river, where is a normal little

village with a church of normal size, yet such a gem of fourteenth-century architecture as Oxford cannot rival. The curé himself opened it to us, a charming old priest ; an atmosphere of living use was in every part of his church. This was no last year's nest ; and of all its rich and floreate sculpture very little had been broken in the ages, whether by Huguenots or Red Republicans. One of our companions said it was a pity that such a marvel should be hidden away : I have not that feeling. France made it ; it was the expression in its day of the French mind, done for the glory of religion and for man's most civilised delight : the beauty stands, carrying on its work of beauty (I speak as a layman), perpetuating and enriching the culture of a people among whom culture is more widely spread and deeper penetrating than in any other European race. A French peasant's son from any hamlet may become anything ; and if his roots are here in St. Père, this church, whether he attended it or no, will have made him the better and more characteristic Frenchman.

That is what always strikes me in France, how close the supreme expression of intelligence is to the soil. Rodin seems to grow right out of it. So, if you like, does Thomas Hardy, but Mr. Hardy is admittedly exceptional—as is Mr. Lloyd George. Consider Mr. Lloyd George simply as a phenomenon, and you will recognise in him that

In Praise of France

tremendous strength of the primitive, the tough peasant fibre. Only, what Mr. Lloyd George lacks to increase his effectiveness is precisely that unconsciousness transmitted cultivation, through the developed artistic instinct, which is everywhere in France.

Culture has many phases and the French educate in many ways : their school standards are far more exacting than ours. But they are also educated, less arduously, by a trained appreciation of what they eat and drink. At Avallon nothing struck us Irish strangers more than to see workmen coming in to have their dinner at the Chapeau Rouge. It cost a good deal, and by the standards of Paris or London it was worth much more than it cost ; but railway porters and other workmen used to afford themselves the dark rich Burgundian sauces and their half litre of Burgundy wine. They are highly paid nowadays ; so is similar labour with us, and the Irish railway servant would think little of spending the 3s. on porter ; but I have never seen him sitting down among the local bourgeois to the most civilised and excellent meal that his town can supply. These men without collars were in no way embarrassed by that lack ; they behaved, in short, exactly like anyone else in the room, except that one or two kept their caps on—and this, after all, is only a form of conservatism which the Houses of Parliament

The Yonne to the Loire

have not yet abandoned. It is certainly no mark of disrespect. The richest peasant in the other valley of which I have to tell wore his peaked cap in his own house while he entertained us—and not us only, but his mayor.

If we did not stay longer in the Avallonais to try conclusions seriously with the trout, it was because French friends had invited us to Orleans for the annual festival in honour of Jeanne d'Arc. The journey from Avallon, some eighty miles, can be made in a day, if you get up at 4.30 : we preferred to sleep at Gien and spend three or four hours at Auxerre, where is a cathedral not only beautiful in itself, but beautiful by its position beside and beyond the Yonne. From Auxerre we crossed the high ground that divides the basin of the Seine from the basin of the Loire. Next morning, starting very early to reach Orleans for high mass, we had time at Gien to walk down to the river. Two days before this, sun had come back to a chilly world, and come to stay ; this Sunday morning it was scarcely one hour risen when we came in sight of the wide bridge ; the water was gilded with the low rays, the spaced-out poplar trees on the farther bank were washed with pale gold. No one was about, there was no air or wind, I cannot describe the stillness ; the swift-flowing river was silent as the trees, yet it, like them, seemed to have a finger on lip ; all was

In Praise of France

hushed yet thrilling with jubilation ; spring had come, the sap was surging ; the world stood there glistening, fixed as if on canvas, but on the very brink of vital movement, a virgin ready to wed. Harpignies might have translated that ineffable clearness of vibrant air.

Orleans *en fête* was not normal France ; it was a whirl of sight-seeing ; our beautiful hostess, looking after us and her numerous cousinage, ran like a mountain stream, and her voice ran faster, with as many colours in it as the beflagged and decorated streets. Is there anything on earth with so much variety of charm as the speech of a charming Frenchwoman ? It was a sad affair to go on to Orleans and be tourists at Blois ; for at Blois only we were made to feel ourselves tourists.

All we had learnt was to avoid one named hotel, said to be spoilt by English and Americans ; so we scanned the array of omnibuses and got into the least ostentatious. I ought to have observed that it was first in the rank. The place was modest when we got there, rooms cheap and clean ; so after survey of the town we returned hopefully to *déjeuner*. It was disappointing to find nobody but English speakers at the tables, and more waiters than guests. We had to order *à la carte*, and the first dish recommended to us cost forty francs. When at last we had made the most frugal selection possible and were entering upon an

elegant arrangement of veal with vermicelli and truffles, one of the too many waiters aggressively planked down on our table a bottle of Worcester sauce. "That," said the Younger Generation to me, "is a very subtle insult." I wonder what the chef would have said about it, for, to do the hotel justice, his dish was the last word of distinction. But we went out to get our coffee in the most ordinary little place we could find, and we asked the *patron* where French people ate in Blois. He laughed and indicated to us the Gerbe d'Or, which has this additional attraction, that it is on the upper level of the town near the terrace, with its view of the river that is perhaps the most beautiful of all beautiful spots in Blois ; and it gave us an excellent dinner among the people of the town (but here were no workmen), with excellent wine thrown in, for considerably less than our *escalope de veau* alone cost us.

We were also told where to stay cheaply in Amboise, and there we stayed ; but between trains and nightingales a little way off, and a little owl in the lime just outside the windows, sleep was difficult ; and I was sorry we had not tried the famous Lion d'Or or the Cheval Blanc, neither of which proved to be an extortionate animal. But at the Lion d'Or we heard some Americans complaining angrily because the *déjeuner*—which cost eight francs, say 4s. at the exchange of that day—

In Praise of France

only included three or four kinds of *hors d'œuvre*. Fit only for a third-class hotel, they said. Why do such people stir beyond the Grand Hotel de Blois? They were not likely to discern that the white *ordinaire* provided by this Lion was just about all that a light wine should be, or that the local *vin vieux* of the Cheval Blanc was the excellent red which I have remembered more than thirty years.

We were not feeling like tourists at Amboise, because the friend to whose house we were going next day came over to meet us; and even when we were being escorted in a party round the château, the guide proved to have a brother in our friend's commune, and was humanised at once. But if I had to be a tourist, I would sooner be a tourist at Amboise than almost anywhere. The singing of the nightingales on that May evening in the island across which the bridge is carried was a thing to remember; and the colour of great plane trees on the Mall, just breaking into the first leaf, and seen up against the evening sky, made us cry out for one who can catch the thrill of colour.

Next day we were under vow to meet our host and assist at a tasting of wines by a company of Belgian buyers. The tram took us out from Tours along the Loire on the right bank, and I revived my memory of cellars and even dwellings cut and tunnelled into the chalk cliff.

The Yonne to the Loire

In the town hall of Vouvray we found a company of some thirty or forty people gathered about a table set with bottles and glasses. The mayor of Vouvray made a speech from which I realised that the illustrious Gaudissart's vein is not lost in the country of Gaudissart's creator. But, after all, the wine's best recommendation came when he had finished his discourse, and we were introduced—with much clinking of glasses—to the vintages : first to that of 1921, which by general consent in that district promised to be the best of living memory. Scarcely two months yet in bottle, it had developed no effervescence, but was already a delightful drink. The charming old gentleman into whose care I fell said to me sadly that he did not think he could save much of his own reserve to mature ; the ladies of his household *tombent dessus*, and there was likely to be little left.

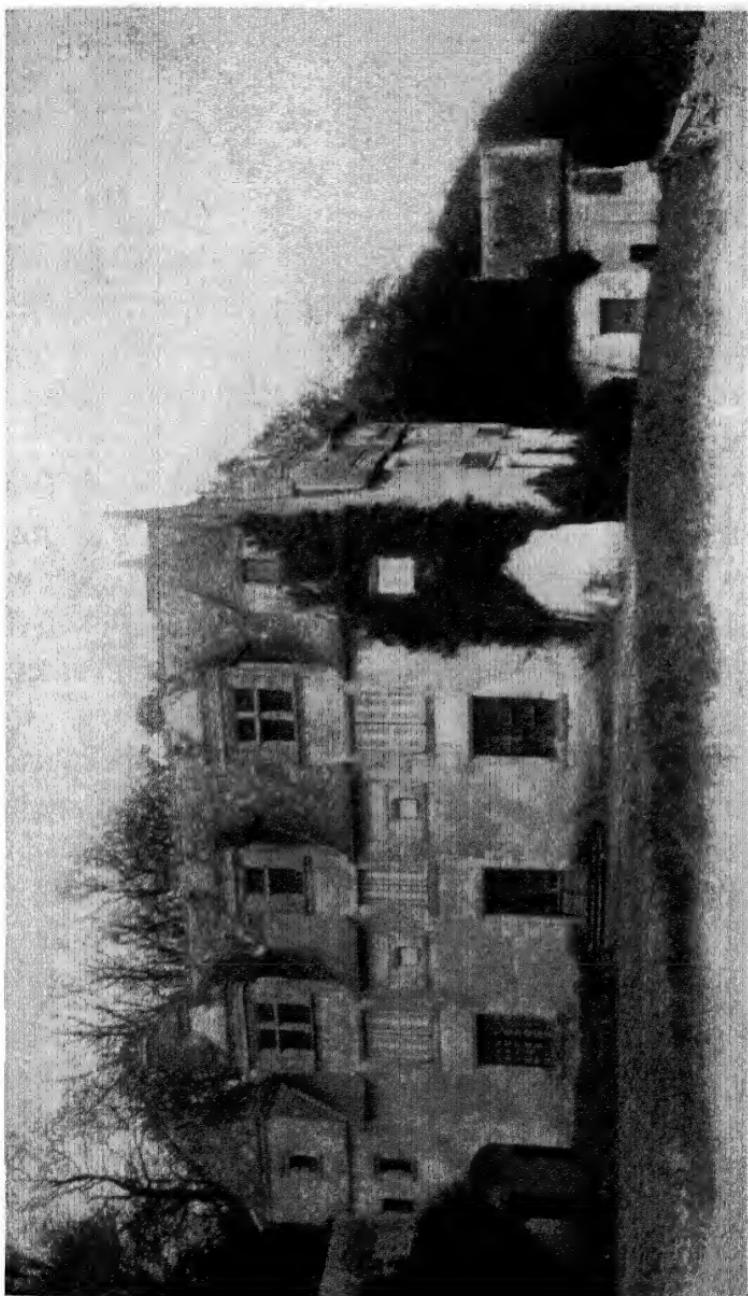
I hope for his sake that some escaped them, for local anticipations were right. That wine is now at prohibitive prices.

Vouvray of a good year will keep extraordinarily. We tasted a bottle of 1874, and if it was a fragrance rather than a wine, that of 1893 was admirable, and the 1906 perfection : not by any means the sweetened stuff which most people associate with the idea of Vouvray Mousseux. The big dealers, of whom there are a few, when they go to stan-

In Praise of France

dardise Vouvray, spoil it ; but the output of the district is essentially one of small vineyards, each small owner making his own wine. Each man there wanted you to taste not only 1906 or 1911, but his 1906, his 1911. Very hardly did we escape sober ; and we took no part in the subsequent visit to the vineyards or to the cellars, one of which has more than a kilometre of tunnels. We were to see all this detail at leisure near by in the valley of the Brenne.

Side valleys in Touraine are very different from the Burgundian gorges. Wide and gently sloping, with water meadows on each side of the stream, they are replicas in little of the Loire valley itself. The ordinary buildings have not the mediæval look which charms in the Avallon country ; but it is rare to find one which has not some unexpected harmony of line. And, of course, for domestic architecture on the grand scale, Touraine is unapproachable. Within two miles of the farmhouse where these much-travelled friends of ours had fixed their country abode, there were three châteaux. One, facing them, had its front in the manner of the *grand siècle*, but a wing had been added later in a more Italian style. A second, farther up the valley, had been given by Louis XIV. to Louise de la Vallière, and bore her name ; it was almost secluded from sight, which somehow seemed in keeping with that gentle memory. The



Boucher, Tours

CHÂTEAU DE LA CÔTE, CHANÇAY

third, on the same side as our farm, was simply to my mind the most perfect thing I had seen in Touraine : a design carried out in its entirety when architecture was at its best, simple, almost severe, yet perfect in the rhythm of its proportion, and in every swift, decisive, yet harmonious line : all unchanged since it was built. Tudor houses in England may have a more comfortable warmth of aspect, but they have not that distinction, that elegance combined with strength, which marks the best French work. And I believe there is no little vine-grower in those valleys who is not affected in his instincts by what he daily beholds. It gives him the cult of the exquisite.

Almost every man there is a vine-grower, and one soon learnt that a vine-grower's work is a constant effort after the exquisite. Their talk was like an artist's, not like a labourer's—laborious though they are. They speak to you of flavours and of the developing bouquet with amazing choice and felicity of terms. But indeed in Touraine the whole speech is beautiful : it pleased me like a sonnet to hear a man say that his horse was *courtois*. And assuredly the prevailing industry raises the standard of culture. There is nothing mechanical about it : each process needs feeling for the art, each year's crop presents a different problem, and each man's great treasure is his store of choice old bottles.

In Praise of France

We went one afternoon to drink a glass with the chief wine-grower of the commune, a hardy old man, with fine-cut features. These Tourangeaux are an aristocracy among peasants ; beauty is common, and above all, I have nowhere seen so many beautiful old women. The white coiffe sets off their delicately chiselled lines, and though the face is hard and weather beaten, it has the quality of some subtle sculpture in wood. The son, a man of forty, was ruder in aspect, yet he too perhaps, like his wine, would acquire distinction with age. The wine which they had fetched out for us was the famous '93. It was opened with much care, and then a little tragedy began. The old man looked at it, sniffed at it, passed it to his son—it was condemned. Another bottle was brought, dismissed in its turn, then another, and even the fourth did not satisfy its maker. "I ought," he said, "not to have put it in bottles till April. It was a strong wine, but I was afraid. I bottled it in February, as the custom is." He was talking, it will be understood, of an operation that took place, a decision that had to be made, nearly thirty years ago. But I did not know why he was afraid to wait till April. It seems that when the vine shoots in the fields the wine in the barrels feels it, and begins to work in the vats ; it may all go wrong. In the bottle it is hermetically sealed against this sympathy.

Wine-making is a fascinating mystery, to give the word its old sense. We learnt that for red wine you leave the grapes to ferment with the skins a fortnight, but white grapes are pressed at once. Red grapes so treated yield the pink wine, the *vin gris* (or *rosé*), which one sometimes drinks and sometimes finds very pleasant. Probably every Frenchman knows that it is the skin which gives red wine the colour ; yet I doubt if many know what we, who were gardeners, discovered in the vineyards, that (in Vouvray at all events) the black grape is left with one long cane, as in a greenhouse, but the white is cut right back to the stock, and makes all its new growth each year.

In Vouvray, where small holdings are the rule, it is still considered a new fashion to have the vines in ordered rows, so that a shallow plough can pass between them. When they were dotted in without order, work about their roots could only be done with the short mattock-like tool, which you use stooping double—a most exacting labour, and much of it is still so done. We asked why a spade would not do. “ You don’t get on fast enough,” was the answer. Surely a laborious people !

French workmen seem to me finer trained than the English, inured as they are to the two kinds of hardship, suffering the sun as they endure the cold. Yet when I was visiting the school in one

In Praise of France

village the master told me that the children were not as hardy as I thought. Wine makes them bright and quick, but does not build them up ; and in that country wine is not only used when we use tea, but largely replaces milk. Land that can go under vines is too valuable to leave in grass. Whatever greenery grows by the roadside is regularly exploited ; cows walk out under escort to consume it. Even so, many a household goes without milk. There is a plot for vegetables with every house ; but the small holders often have nothing else but their vines.

The holdings are very small, down to an acre. The biggest holder (he who gave us the '93 wine) had about twenty acres, part of which, down in the level valley, is in tillage ; but the value is in the vines. His crop in the year 1919 sold for 75,000 francs ; nearly all the labour is done by himself and his household, his other outlay is small, chiefly on artificial manures. In short, with twenty acres he is a rich man, who may easily put by 30,000 or 40,000 francs on the year's working ; and though he can be generous with his wine, he is a more amiable edition of Balzac's *Père Grandet* ; has scarcely ever been in a theatre, though Tours is within a drive ; has travelled once (to Switzerland), but has no desire to travel again. I vastly preferred his conversation to that of most tourists, and it is evident that his life contents him.

Yet the economy which so strictly governs him and his like has formidable consequences. In that household, all thought and care was centred upon one being, his daughter's son, a sickly little boy. Far less wealthy people in France or Ireland would spend large sums for the chance of putting vitality into that child by means which that household never dreams of. But the essence of their economy is that the child is the only child of the house, though its parents are young ; and it probably would never have been born had not an elder child died.

That is the fact of all facts in France, for France ; and the two very able people with whom we were staying had reached their conclusions about it. Our hostess held that there must be State endowment of maternity, and on a high scale ; not simply a subsidy to keep body and soul together in one room in Paris. Our host was inclined to think that the importance of number to a state was exaggerated ; that the essential need was to secure complete development for everybody—to create *une foule-élite*, a populace where every man is a picked man. Even for war, especially for modern war, numbers are not everything, nor the main thing.

These questions are chiefly France's affair ; but they are also Europe's concern, for if France goes, European civilisation goes with it. Only in

In Praise of France

France does democracy seem established on a durable basis. Our host emphasised the fact that school teachers, now highly paid, have become bourgeois ; no revolutionists are going to come from that class, which before was their hungry breeding ground. On the whole everybody gets a chance—or if not everybody, a vastly larger proportion than anywhere else—to share in the good things of life ; and everybody is better fitted to share in them.

The railway porters dining at the Chapeau Rouge meant a good deal, when you consider all that is implied. It meant more, that our host's preternaturally clever boy had got much of his schooling at the village school ; and that now, down from Paris for a week-end, he went off to fetch two of his schoolfellows, one a vine-grower's son, one a carpenter's, to spend the afternoon playing croquet ; pleasant, good-looking, friendly lads of fourteen, not the least shy ; and they had held their own in class with the young Parisian. These things explain why often a French peasant woman may see her son take his place easily and naturally in the most cultivated society of Europe. The whole race are the inheritors of a great tradition, which expresses itself in a finished efficiency, closely allied to breeding and to art. All the regimented dressing of the crops along the Loire valley, rank by rank, square by square, was

The Yonne to the Loire

perfect, and also delightful to behold. Nature put her own modification and accent on the straight lines, like a caress ; in Ireland, she marks our wastefulness of ground with elder and with nettle.

But above all I carry away from that month of bursting spring in France a memory of trees. The vine is not universal, but everywhere in France are trees, and every tree is grown to a purpose. Our host in the valley of the Brenne showed us with pride the commune's poplars planted on a swampy piece of commonage, each tree earning, it was calculated, a franc a year ; and then after thirty years it is harvested, and a sapling takes its place. Who that sees France can say that treating trees as a crop, instead of letting them grow, as with us, uncared for and unhandled, lessens their charm ? When I came back, even the beauty of Wicklow seemed to me disfigured by ragged, stunted, and useless growths. I missed the ordered beauty. In France trees are normally straight trunks, carrying their foliage high ; with us they are normally giant bushes. The result in France is that play of air and sunshine below the high-lifted leafage which gives to French scenery its peculiar lightness and grace. The eye passes with delight through long avenues, where silver-grey leads up from lush grass to lighter greenness through which the sky is felt or seen.

If I had to choose between the two valleys of

In Praise of France

my stay, the Brenne would give me more of this airy lightness ; it is more typically representative of France than the Cousin, with its rocks and gorges and buzzards and complete setting for a brigand opera. Yet for all its superficial ferocity, that corner of Burgundy is a most homely friendly country ; and finally, although the Brenne was created by Nature to be a home for trout and big trout, it is said to hold few of them (but they could easily be introduced), and for what there might be I was not allowed to fish. The prefect of that department had extended the close season by local order to all kinds of fishing ; and I was staying with the mayor of the commune, to whom the communal *garde-champêtre* had to make his daily report. My host in quite other regions of the world had known too many difficulties of diplomacy for me to present him with the complications attendant on prosecuting a citizen of the Irish Free State, who was also his guest.

So between Brenne and Cousin I have no choice to make ; my blessing be on both, may I some day revisit both, and in both catch trout ! Yet if I do not, the wine of Burgundy and the wine of Touraine will be there to console ; and I need not drink it in either place as a tourist or alone.

II

FROM ST. MALO TO ANGERS

ST. MALO in September, full of English-speaking people, was no use to me : but the luck of the road provided me there with an introduction in my possible destination, which was the City of Angers. Barring that, I started without guide-book, without a plan, with no guiding impulse except the luck of the road and a vague purpose to drink the favourite wine of Athos in the country where it is grown. I picked Dol for my first stage, partly because I liked the name, so evidently ancient, but chiefly because it was the nearest place certain to have an hotel ; also, a little, because it had a river which by my calculation ought to hold sea-trout. And so the train took me, in a state of virgin ignorance, towards the interior of Northern Brittany, travelling second-class because it is an offence against officialism to book third for so short a journey. The French are a pleasant people, but by some strange dispensation their railway system is planned, manned and administered exclusively by Prussians.

The country was flatter than Picardy—flat as

In Praise of France

the wheat-growing plains of Beauce,—but, unlike anything else I had seen in France, broken into small fields and hedged about as if it were in England. Then after about ten miles, a great hummock stood up out of the plain with signs of quarrying on it : it was the Mont Dol, I learnt from my neighbours : a little farther on came another rise to our right, with a great church on top of it. That was Dol—and the church was a cathedral. In Ireland St. Patrick, who got his ecclesiastical training in Gaul, set us up with three hundred and fifty bishoprics, for, as we gather, no clan or sept would let itself be bishoped from without. The same must have been true of this other Celtic country, for in my wandering I seemed to meet cathedrals everywhere, though the dioceses are lumped this many hundred years into some larger grouping.

Town and station were a long way apart at Dol, as generally happens in these old towns : rail likes the plains, but fortification liked the hillock, and what I met first was a long pleasant boulevard, friendly even on that wet September evening ; entirely French, but entirely usual. Next, a little square with a post-office and a war memorial ; then suddenly, entering the main street at right angles, I was back four or five centuries at least. Nothing in St. Malo had prepared me for these quaintly gabled houses, their dormer windows, the

fantastic line of the roofs, the exquisite slating, like fish-scales, and the long lovely curve of a street which keeps the line it had when there were Prince Bishops in Dol governing a great part of Brittany. Hugo, in his *Quatre Vingt Treize*, says that Dol is not a town but a street. The same could be affirmed of a hundred Irish places having like this about five hundred hearths ; but, alas ! our streets have none of that beauty.

I left my kit at the Grand-Maison Hotel, which belongs of right to all this antiquity, and, following my usual instinct, went to look for running water. What I reached could be hardly called running—a stagnant muddy ditch, no use to me whatever ; and so I fell back on the cathedral. Here was a great rudely constructed porch on the south side, decorated on its flanks with sculptures that puzzled me : powerful things, primitive in their simplification, yet somehow not exactly primitive in suggestion. But the light was failing, and I left it at that and went in to dinner. Since there were at that meal a couple of English tourists, and since Dol is a stopping-place on the motor drive from St. Malo to Mont St. Michel, probably a great number of my readers will know that Dol and Mont Dol are inland cousins of the Mont. They rise out of flat reclaimed slobland—stranded ports like Romney and Winchelsea ; and my river, where I hoped for fishing, was no more than a

In Praise of France

tidal ditch through the long miles of reclamation. These instructed persons will know also that the sculptures which puzzled me were sixteenth-century work, carried out by the restorers of the cathedral in deliberate imitation of the fourteenth-century roughness. I had not known that anyone was self-consciously primitive so early.

One thing, however, I did learn which may have escaped the passing tourist : in the Grand-Maison people were at cards, and when I saw a dummy hand put down and heard trumps (or no trumps) declared, I supposed it to be bridge. But all the cards under the seven were out of the pack, and the game was manille, which presumably must be one of the parents from which the supplanter of whist is descended. Very merry my elderly hostess and her friends were over it, though Mrs. Battle would have thought them shamefully indifferent to the rigour of the game.

Two other matters may be recorded. The neighbourhood makes an admirable cheese, which may be bought in London, and is labelled *Notre Dame du Mont-Dol*. Rather like Port Salut, but better. The other concerns a notice in the cathedral by which the Archbishop of Rennes ordains that no woman shall be admitted with uncovered head. It adds that no woman who is *comme il faut* goes abroad except *coiffée*. I suppose we ordinary humans do ill to praise and

admire the sleek, glossy hair, so exquisitely neat, with which the young French housewife goes about the business of her household marketing. If she slipped into the church on her way home, would God really be angry ?

The orthodox move after Dol would be to Mont St. Michel, where, as everybody knows, the ideal omelette was made by the Mère Poulard. But the Mère Poulard is dead and her omelette is now syndicalised, and can be had in half a dozen competing establishments. Or, can it, I wonder ? Does it keep the personal touch which it must have had to earn a lady this odd immortality ? What a talent ! And is it utilised now in some other sphere ? And can heavenly omelettes be created in some other sphere without the breaking of eggs ?—Anyhow, at the little station of Dol I decided for a ticket to Rennes.

That little station should not be left without a word : the station hotel extends its gardens so as to be continuous with the platform, and there are seats there in the sun where you may sit and drink your vermouth. Altogether the most welcoming friendly little station I ever did see, but the Prussian is in the ticket-office. When I went to book, he told me firmly I could not travel by that train. It went to Rennes—but my journey was not long enough to allow of my going on an express. I offered to pay second-class : that was rejected,

In Praise of France

and then I heard a voice from behind prompting me surreptitiously and in a whisper, exactly like a schoolboy in class. I asked for the name suggested. It was a place just beyond Rennes : and I got my ticket. There was the regulation : there was also the recognised means of evasion—at the cost of a few sous. The French people, I fancy, accept it all as part of the training for their great natural concern of circumventing the tax-collector—in which they have no European equals.

Rennes was very bright and very well ordered, very French under the clean hard sunlight which sharpened all its contours. I liked its spacious Champ de Mars, I liked the gay little garden constructed over a tunnel where the river is bridged across for some two hundred yards in the centre of the town, and you get the long stretch of water shining each way beyond all the reds and yellows of an autumn parterre. I liked the meeting of the slow streams, Ille and Vilaine, and the general suggestion of deliberate drifting water traffic. I liked also the church of St. Germain with its beautiful east window where the sixteenth-century glass leaves so many uncoloured spaces that the whole makes you think of some celestial patchwork. I liked the shrine of St. Anthony of Padua with his pleasant litany ; but except that Rennes was a characteristic piece of north-western France, where the entirely modern skilfully en-

compasses and enshrines the old, I cannot tell you why I found the place so enjoyable. Perhaps something was due to a *petit vin de muscadet* (said to come from Anjou, but much more like a Moselle) and a good deal to the amazingly capable and friendly waitress who kept eight or ten tables going briskly in the open air those two sunny days.

But Rennes was not the kind of town I wanted to linger in ; the Ille and Vilaine were manifestly not trout waters ; and in the fishing-tackle shop where I gathered information, people told me that their customers generally went in the direction of Fougères.

At Vitré, the junction, I heard much talk of a *couronnement* that was happening on this particular Saturday. My neighbours were too busy with each other for a polite stranger to interrupt, and I arrived at Fougères speculating why the town was profusely decorated and full of so vast a crowd. Multitudes of clergy and attendant troops of devout parishioners showed that the ceremony was religious.

Once more the Boulevard de la Gare made a long avenue to the old town ; it climbed uphill ; crowds were everywhere, all in black, which is the Breton way, brightened up here and there by patches of strong colour on the women's costumes. Beyond the top the road descended again and I

In Praise of France

saw the tail of a cortège passing and the crowd closing in behind a train of violet that draped somebody or something. Just beside me a little pâtisserie had a charming window. Pleasant people there, in the middle of all their traffic, gave me enlightenment with my tea.

In the ancient château of Fougères, built on the ruins of an older fortress which Henry II. of England had smashed, was preserved a statue of the Virgin and Child, sculptured in stone by some craftsman of an even earlier day. In 1449 the English again captured and sacked the place, and flung the statue over the ramparts. Many years later it was discovered buried in the marsh, and Fougères decided to do honour to Notre Dame des Marais. A crown was placed on the head of the gentle little lady, she was carried round the streets in triumph, and set finally in the church of St. Sulpice which stands on the lower level near to where she was found. Each year, on the 8th of September, she and her Babe are borne in procession about the town, and each year more jewels are added to crown or robe. I turned back to meet the cortège, and, following it, found myself plunging down a steep narrow street whose houses were many hundred years old : some had the first floor projecting over the sidewalk and strutted out on pillars of wood or stone. At the foot of the street we swung across a narrow bridge

over a little river and up to the narrow gate of a huge mediæval fortress ; through another gate and tower, and then out into a green open space where a platform was set and chairs provided for a congregation of perhaps a thousand : but twice as many swarmed up on to every coign of vantage, while behind the platform a long assembly of nuns in huge white coifs took up their station on the ramparts and made a background to all that array of bishops in violet and purple, while a Cardinal in his scarlet harangued.

What interested me most was his tribute to the Mayor whose idea it had been to associate the religious ceremony with the municipality's possession, this monument of feudal times. For at Fougères as elsewhere, officialdom is no way clerical ; yet here was the non-clerical bureaucracy doing its best to be friendly to the Church. It was not, like the festival of Jeanne d'Arc at Orleans, an occasion which had a military significance : no troops are at Fougères, now a purely industrial town given over to bootmaking : but it was a practical demonstration that French authority in Brittany at all events wants to keep the *Union Sacrée* alive. The most interesting figure to me was one of the *Pères Blancs* in his white Arab robe. It is little more than thirty years since Cardinal Lavigerie who founded the *Pères Blancs* was pelted with execrations for his *toast d'Alger*

In Praise of France

when at a public banquet he called on all French Catholics to join him in wishing long life to the Republic. To-day we all know that Lavigerie and Leo XIII. who prompted his speech have won : and who is to compute what France owes and Europe owes to these pioneers of the *Union Sacrée* ?

Yet, coming away from the ceremony in the middle of that surging crowd, I was amazed to think of the formidable courage that is in French politicians of the Left. Here is this amazingly powerful organisation of the Church, a state within their state, cherished by multitudes of their best blood and brains ; and yet the politicians have attacked it, smacked its face, insulted it, done it cruel injury even, perhaps with a bigotry of opposition, but honestly and firmly determined to have no interference from any clergy or any cult in their national concerns.

After the ceremony I settled myself in an hotel and succeeded in finding a friendly fisherman. There was a trout-stream near Fougères, the upper waters of the Couesnon ; but I could see nothing in very attractive waters except little dace that pecked at my dry fly. Still that excursion gave me sense of what Balzac emphasises in *Les Chouans* and Hugo in *Quatre Vingt Treize*—the difficulty of the Breton country for military operations, as compared with the rest of France.

With those enormous hedges, every field is really, as Balzac said, a fortress. And if you look over the valley of the Couesnon from the high terrace of the Jardin Public you could easily believe that the whole is still, as he described it, one forest. Trees are everywhere : every hedgerow has its line of them. Yet go out into it, and you see that all is to-day reclaimed, broken in, managed and civilised. Half the semblance of forest comes from the fact that nearly all the fields are planted with apple trees among which they raise their crops of sarrasin, whose stalks, red as withered sorrel, leave a reddish stubble and the ranged stooks of sheaves are ruddy notes of colour. In the time Balzac wrote of, cake made of sarrasin was the traditional peasant's food, like oatcake in Scotland : now they only thrash it for their pigs or poultry. Little trace is left of that dim mysterious land of devout barbarism which the two great novelists describe, and from these regions, once the very centre of Chouannerie, the Breton language is disappearing. Only once in a fortnight did I hear a tongue spoken that was not French ; and then I rather think that those two artisans on their way from Brest were not Bretons, but of some Balkan people. Their French was like an Italian's.

The forest is there still, of course—plenty of it ; but nothing could show the victory of civilisation

In Praise of France

more completely. A long straight dusty road, yet tree-shaded, took me out, and where the boulevard ended, forest began : all beechwood, very tall timber, perfectly kept, the ground clear of undergrowth, a clean russet carpet from which the stems shot up, distant enough from each other to have full scope for growth, yet near enough to be forced continually upwards in quest of light, instead of spreading sideways. And here I met the most pleasing thing that Fougères showed me.

The main road ploughed on broad and straight, cleaving the forest in two, and on each hand were tumble-down shanties—the booths of *sabotiers*. One man was working : his booth was partitioned in two, and on the right lay a hatchet of odd shape among a pile of chips. As I watched, the craftsman picked up a section of young beech trunk : it had been split in four. Quickly with easy strokes of the broad-faced blade he shaped it, and in two minutes there was a sabot rough-hewn. Then leaving his pile of big chips he moved into the other partition, more like a workshop, less like a wood-shed. Here a knife, such as is used for slicing turnips, was fastened at the end of its three-foot blade to a ring in a big block, on which it turned freely. With this he set to slicing and paring the wood, sometimes scooping out large chunks, next moment delicately shaving and

rounding till the thing took the contours of a booted foot. Each step in the process was evidently traditional. Certain nicks were cut across the grain, and to them he worked. When it was smoothed off to his satisfaction he handed it to his wife : for in this trade, which goes from parents to children, the woman always has the task of scooping out the sabot when the man has shaped it. She looked no more than twenty, though her son, a mischievous Chérubin of seven or eight, played about the shed, learning his trade by year-long observation : and she was strong, and needed to be.

Having clamped the sabot by wedges into a vice, she took a sort of broad-gauged auger and threw against the wood the full pressure of her strength from the hips upward, her feet set wide apart for the thrust ; then with a twist of the whole body she gave the tool its boring action, thrusting and twisting at once. It was harder work than the man's, they both agreed. In all primitive life—and this craft is probably as old as the forest—man is the shaper, designer, and director ; woman the labourer, his *bête de somme*. Yet here also skill was needed. She took one measure only, then the scooping and gauging went on till she handed me the finished sabot, polished like a shell and, like a shell, showing pink where the light pierced the wood's whiteness. That, she said, was the

In Praise of France

guide to work by : when the pink showed, you were far enough.

These kindly people live in the town : the hut is their workshop, they do not move from place to place : the State lets them put up these *baraquements* on the public road, and sells them the timber, dear enough, but on payment by instalments. Elsewhere, alder is used (Lancashire uses no other, and I have seen clog-makers at work down in Somerset where the wood could be had) ; young elm also, and plane, will serve : but here at Fougères it is a country of beech.

I went into the forest and, propped against a tree-trunk, watched all these slim dainty persons stand quietly about me. From each stem little feathery fronds shot out here and there, breaking the sheer unity of line : and the sunshine, sifted down through the upper canopy of leaves, caught in their transverse greenesses and made darting patterns of green light through the shade. All was the still life of the forest : yet a few hundred yards away, up-thrown dust hung in a blue mist over the road, and the *sabotiers'* brown booths were dimly discernible. A squirrel leapt in the high tree-tops, so vivid a red that when he rested with sunlight on him, he was like a piece of coloured glass. And as the sun sank, all out towards the western fringe of the wood became a glory of gold flooding in, illuminating all this

solemnity with a radiance more solemn than the greenest gloom. I watched a group of people at play there, and their gestures and grouping fell into large broad lines, the colour of their clothes into dark rich masses : I had seen it all on canvas, but where ? Then I remembered Watteau, and knew through whose eyes I had been brought to perceive the classic dignity that can be in a game of blindman's-buff.

A mile or two farther on in that forest I came upon my vision of the perfect house in the French fashion : a château of the eighteenth century or later, which had not only gone clear away from the feudal idea of turreted building, but freed itself too from the stiffness of the *Grand Siècle*. It had a lovely emplacement in a broad clearing among skilfully planted tree-clumps facing down to a tiny stream : it looked so habitable, so spacious and so gracious, distinguished and yet easy, sitting on the ground as if it had grown there, almost even as if it had settled down like a resting partridge : it might rise up if you clapped your hands at it.

Another forest picture that I keep is of woodmen sweating in the shade that hot September day as they worked clearing out the inferior timber with seven-pound axes, curiously malformed to my eye, and the haft a mere broom-handle unshaped. The clumsy tool made their work ugly to watch ; effective, no doubt, but

In Praise of France

lacking the poise and rhythm of a good man with a Canadian axe ; and it was in odd contrast with the fine instinct for forestry that one felt everywhere displayed in the spacing of the timber and the perfect texture of that wood carpet.

From Fougères I headed south, thinking to see Vitré and Le Mans on my way : but I had counted without Prussianism. At Vitré, officials insisted that my train for Angers went in forty minutes instead of three hours later, as the time-table indicated : I had barely time to dash out and reconnoitre a fine cathedral with noticeable glass chandeliers : and, as everywhere else in that country, old roofs with slating sometimes the colour of a pigeon's breast, sometimes black and glossy as a crow, but everywhere in their outline having that abrupt decisive contour, the *ligne courte et cassée*, which is the signature of France. Then came my next stage, Le Mans, and when I was told again that in despite of the railway guide I could only travel on by a train which left after three-quarters of an hour, I fought, and ascertained that Prussianism insists you shall complete your journey by the first train available. Without prompting from anybody, I did what no doubt every Frenchman does in the same circumstances : went out to sit in a café till I should have missed this *premier train de correspondance*.

A la Renommée des Huîtres was a tempting sign,

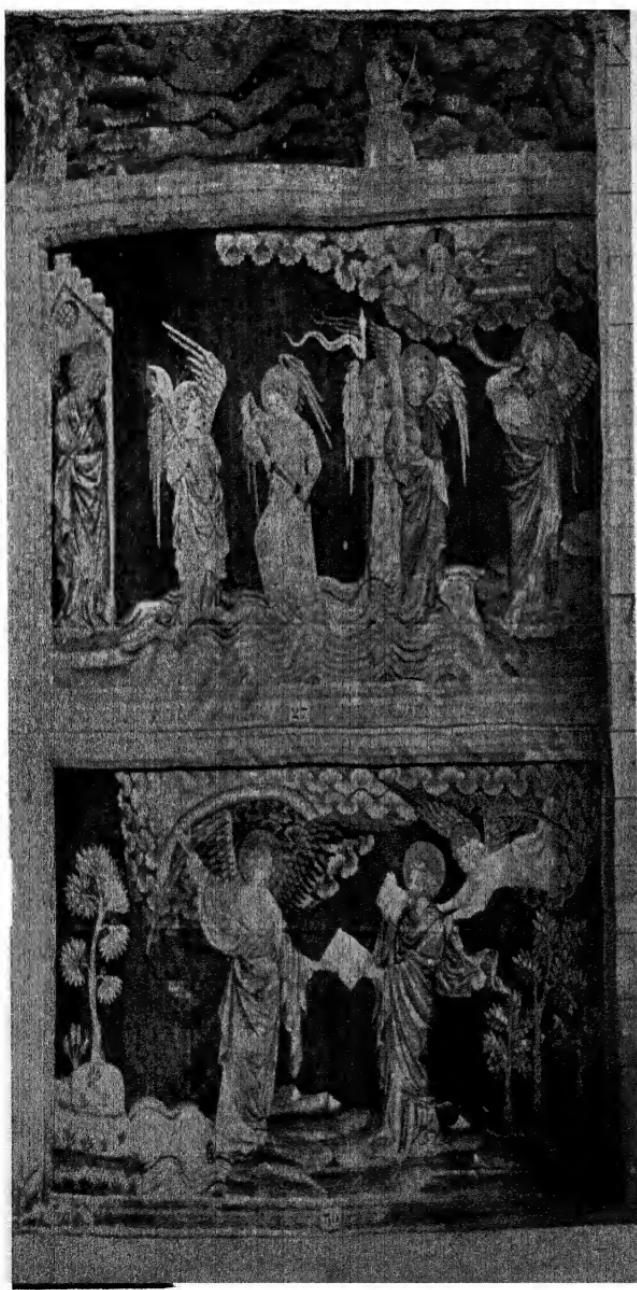
and so there sat I and ate strange-shaped green Portuguese molluscs with very excellent dry Anjou wine, then strolled on to look at a great grave splendid church which I took to be the cathedral, and was certainly worthy to be one. But after a while I learnt that this was Notre Dame de la Couture, and that the cathedral was elsewhere and ought to be seen—as I should not have needed to be told if one's education were more decent. It was like coming by accident on a work called the “Divina Commedia.” But that day I could only get a fleeting visual impression of the most beautiful building that I have ever seen, and cursed myself for dallying with oysters.

Still, under the sunlight at Angers next morning it seemed good to be there : no longer in Brittany but unmistakably in France—the European country in which northern and southern meet, and Atlantic and Baltic influences blend with the Mediterranean tradition. One felt that strongly at once in the very beautiful public gardens which at first looked essentially southern. Yet half at least of the plants used for their elaborate colour-effects grow almost as well with us—the roses, the big dahlias, and fuchsias, and even the cannas, scarlet, salmon, or yellow and frog-spotted. But no English garden that I have seen achieves that perfect conventionality in which statuary is so well introduced, so fitting a centre to the boulevards,

In Praise of France

discreetly gay, and to the wide modern streets with houses close-shuttered against sun in a fashion that tells of the south, and having, as is usual in France, doors that seem merely to be a hole in the wall. No English door ever looks so shut as a French one : it calls attention to itself in a way that invites to enter. I have always a little the feeling at most French doors that I am knocking at a convent gate. But, as one said to me, it is all the greater distinction to find oneself inside what does not open too easily.

For the lovers of antiquity, Angers has, Heaven knows, enough to please them : the old quarter of the town is full of little narrow streets with stone-built stone-staired houses that may be any age, and have remained solid and habitable. And it is full of museums. Just beside the cathedral I came on one, looked after by an enchanting old lady who said, "*Dans un instant je suis à vous*"—almost as if it were "*Je suis à toi.*" She did not recite a litany of official details, but explained simply all that was necessary to know about the amazing collection of tapestries which were under her charge. She loved them all, that was clear : if she had a favouritism for the fourteenth century, well, very largely it was because Touraine has none of it. Anjou is jealous of its better-known neighbour. But she carried my judgment with her. These earlier things, for the most part in



PHOTOGRAPHIES

TAPESTRIES AT ANGERS

strong reds and blues, had plenty of space about the figure groups : the artists who designed them were not afraid that their canvases would look empty : life and movement were through all of them : whereas the formal sixteenth century, with its decorously subdued tones, gave you crowded panels in which there was too much of everything except movement and life.

These priceless things were gathered up within the nineteenth century all over the diocese by an intelligent priest from other priests less intelligent. Between the First Empire and the Second such treasures were not valued : turned out of the churches, they served for anything : to cover a parquet when the walls were being whitewashed, or to prevent horses from galling themselves by rubbing in a stable. One particularly fine panel had been acquired for thirty francs from a *curé de campagne* who used it as a cover to screen growing lettuce. Mr. Pierpont Morgan had passed through here and inspected the treasures, and regretted his lost opportunities. But would a Pierpont Morgan ever have cared to buy at thirty francs ?

The good dame had a little grievance which did not mar the amplitude of her *embonpoint*. Her museum was not mentioned in the guide-book, and people missed it, though it was unique : whereas “ *il n'y a pas un chat qui vienne à Angers qui ne visite pas le château*, where, so they tell me ”

In Praise of France

(said she, with a fine aloofness), “there is nothing to be seen.” Sure enough, nobody can miss that immense fortress by the river, preserved and restored till it is absolutely complete, with its superb walls rising from its deep fosse and supported with towers, splayed out at their base like elephant’s legs. It was beautiful to behold that fine autumn : great bulks of sunlit, sunwarmed stone up against blue sky and white cloud, light relieved against light ; and for the outside view it was full of interest. But to go round the interior one had to wait and then join a party of something like fifty people, and if there was anything worth seeing, the cheerful *mutilé* who stumped round with us did not succeed in making me perceive it.

Still, perhaps he had not a fair chance at me, for I was fresh from the sight of an adventure. I had sat half an hour on the opposite quay looking at town and château across the river, and as I decided to cross the bridge, the Sunday passers-by were obviously excited about something. I saw under the arches a man drag himself out of the water into one of several cots moored in midstream, from which patient folk were fishing. By the time I reached the bridge, the swimmer was standing up and stripping to the waist, after which, to my amazement, he lifted up from the bottom of the boat and waved proudly some fish as big as a salmon : a carp, at a guess, weighing

not less than seven or eight pounds. And as I listened to the comments about me, the history disentangled itself. The lucky man had hooked this monster, and having no spare line on his reel to let the fish run, simply went overboard till he tired it. But to think that five minutes earlier on the bridge would have given me view of the whole thing !

At the Hôtel-Dieu, where is a beautiful great mediæval vaulted hall, built by Henry II. of England, there was another *gardien* who rivalled the virtues of the lady with the tapestries. He showed me not only the beautiful cloister with an exquisite well-head in wrought-iron, but also a great old tithe barn in process of becoming an annexe to the Musée—for the moment, an adorable jumble of old woodwork. Nowhere in museums have I been left so free to enjoy myself—free as the *gardien's* puppy who gambolled among the cases.

But, I prefer to amuse myself elsewhere than in museums, and the genial banker to whom I had been introduced quickly sent me on to those who could instruct me. I had been laying the foundations of my education about the wines of that region since well before the war, when I first saw Vin d'Anjou on a restaurant list, and ordered it for the sake of Athos, and thereafter drank it for its own whenever I got the chance. Mr. Saints-

In Praise of France

bury has been decrying this wine, though with befitting reservations : for Mr. Saintsbury knows well that Alexandre Dumas would not have attributed to Athos a taste which Alexandre Dumas did not share : indeed it had always struck me that the wine merchants of Anjou did not know their business of publicity, or they would have made more out of this surprisingly effective recommendation in the *Musketeers*. (That may be part of the retribution which a just Providence inflicts on the countrymen of this great genius, for the French as a race seem to think Dumas a negligible author.)

My preliminary survey of what the restaurants in Angers could offer led me to decide that though Touraine is fertile in delicious red wines, Anjou is not. Of the white varieties, I had perhaps extended my investigation to half a dozen bottles ; but the *Compagnie des Grands Vins d'Anjou* took me out in a motor-car to one of their properties, which was a vineyard of some fifty acres with the most modern type of winepress installed, and also a dépôt for receiving and standardising the produce of scores of lesser vine-growers. In Anjou, as in Touraine, the trouble for exporters, and indeed for general commerce, lies in the fact that the growing is all in the hands of very small proprietors, and each man's output is different. From one field to another, from one year to the

next, the yield varies even more than elsewhere in its quality, I was told. The young soldier who was my guide (like so many that we all know, his studies had been cut short by the war, and so after the war he had preferred to take to some outdoor way of life) explained that he and his partners were endeavouring to collect growths resembling each other in character, and blend them in the huge casks which I saw, so that the buyer who bought once could hope to buy again something closely like to his first purchase. As to standing the sea, there was no trouble : their trade, for instance, with Cochin-China was developing fast : but the British Isles were an unexplored field.

I told them what I thought was wanted, and they produced from their stores two or three of the drier wines, which seemed to me very much preferable to the Graves or Barsac that one generally can get. They all had the character which my guide expressed by a word that sounds oddly as applied in praise of wine. The Anjou wine is *plus jeune*, he said, than a Sauternes of the same class ; it has more vivacity, more youth, even when it is matured. But for him the essential Anjou wine was a sweet wine : *très fruité*. “ You would think when you drink it you have the grape in your mouth.” He felt the poetry of his occupation, and I wish good-luck to the handsomest young soldier I ever saw, in a trade which, as he

In Praise of France

said to me, has the charm of growing things, of skilled manufacture, and of commercial venture as well.

Yet I did not feel in him the hereditary instinct which I have met in the *vignerons* of Touraine. He belonged to a more modern development, and one little thing showed it. In the central hall, or vault, from which these vast ranges of cellars lead through old quarries, a couple of women clerks were ticketing and arranging for despatch of bottles. Now in Anjou, at all events, the old-fashioned wine-grower will not let a woman into any place where wine is working. *Il y a de l'influence*, they say : these perilous creatures may affect the fermentation. I said a word about this to my friend, and he turned the subject away hastily. "Our bottles are corked and sealed," he said. "The wine in them could not be affected." I could bet my life he has had remonstrances from veterans in the business.

But probably the veterans also prefer the old-fashioned hand-operated press to his new machine which separates it into three distinct tubs ; the first takes runnings of the pressed grape ; the second, what flows when the screw closes in on the mass ; the third has the ultimate squeezings. And probably the new way is right—even about the women.

If my friend succeeds like another soldier, who

after the Franco-Prussian war set himself in Angers to make a fortune out of improving another drink, he will not need to complain. I was taken to visit the House of Cointreau and shown over the factory by a big jolly Frenchman, one of the founder's sons. Not only the well-known Cointreau, made of Cognac and selected kinds of orange peel (for the most part green-skinned oranges), but half a dozen other liqueurs were in manufacture : there was a great vat full of fermenting cherries, from which would come the *guignolet*, a produce which appeals to me far more than the *triple sec* on which their fortune is built up.

Angers did not put on view in its shops anything that specially tempted me to buy except what are called officially "*produits d'alimentation*"; but in these there was infinite display of that ingenuity and loving care with which the French people envelop all that pertains to eating and drinking. I met people in Angers who complained that their town was ill-provided with restaurants. Well, there is the *Cheval Blanc*, and from inspection at a distance I recommend it confidently to Americans. For myself, though vagrant in my habits, once I had eaten at the *Entr'acte* I went nowhere else. It was a little low restaurant, and its two cream-coloured rooms were reached through an unimpressive passage ; but I shall not

In Praise of France

forget its *petits pois*, its *perdreau rôti*, and the twinkling middle-aged waiter who looked after me with the *bonhomie* which is the charm of Angers. Nearly everything that I got there I have got elsewhere, but seldom so good : only, nowhere else in France have I met their *crêmet aux fraises*, little woodland strawberries served with a thing that was not cream cheese but a quintessential soufflé of cheese and cream, having the same faint tang of harshness in it that was in the wild fruit. And as compared with anything else I met this year in France, the restaurant was cheap to excess.

Indeed, Angers seemed far cheaper than any town in Brittany.

Also, it is worth observing, the day is past when French provincial hotels are a horror in their intimate details. Commercial travellers in the Hôtel Moderne at Fougères recommended me to the Hôtel des Voyageurs at Angers : it had nothing picturesque about it, but a bedroom cost five or six francs, and had *eau courante* in it with excellent fitments for washing : and the frugal English habit of always placing the electric light switch out of reach of a reader in bed is unknown in Angers—indeed, for that matter, in France. Why in the world do not more people go there ? In a fortnight I heard no English but what I carried with me.

Nice people, nice country—with its exceptions,

of course. One day as I lunched at the *Entr'acte* a big butcherly Frenchman came in with his wife and ordered half a *poulet*. She carved, and handed him the wing and slices of the breast. It seemed so trifling a commodity for his huge bulk that one feared to see him snatch the *cuisse* away from her ; but presently another leg was brought. This time he carved it, and pushed the drumstick at her. There is much to be said for the habit of wearing, decorations. I liked to know that the chemist who sold me tooth-powder had the Légion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre : I liked also to notice that this neighbour of mine at the *Entr'acte* had no ribbon. He was the very image of an *embusqué* : I wonder what profitable camouflage hid his nourished carcase.

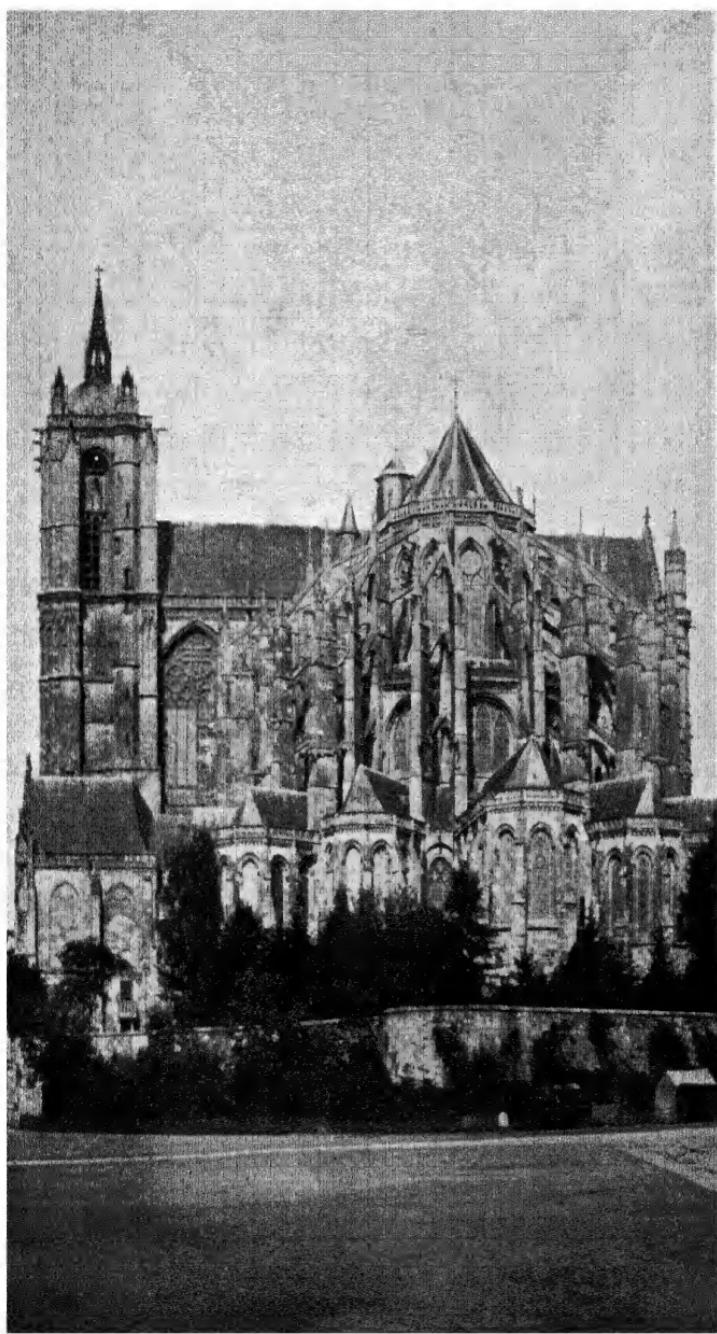
Turning back from Angers, I made sure this time to see Le Mans ; but if any reader does likewise, let him avoid the ostentatious restaurant that makes a centre-piece to the Place de la République. It is the only place in France where I was ever presented with wine that no Christian could drink, and the food was little better. There is a little Restaurant Central tucked away in a courtyard where you can dine very pleasantly, and where in my experience droll things kept happening. The ejection from its kitchen of a whiskered valet who had blown in from somewhere—probably out of a Guity comedy—and his progress down stone

In Praise of France

steps before the slim foot of an angry *chef* was a sight to please anybody.

It is good to go in a good temper to visit the cathedral : yet I think that even if one were badly ruffled, serenity would soon come there. How all that elaborate structure was ever built up, how it was even ever thought of, above all, how it still stands, baffles me to comprehend : but there it is, vast, yet intricate as the subtlest cabinet-maker's work, a huge casket set with jewels that no stone could ever match for colour. In deep sea-water you may meet such blues as are in that glass : in a sunset sky, such reds and purples. Nothing can have that quality of colour that is not translucent. You could drink yourself drunk with looking at it : for in the choir one was shut in by these glories, and nearly all the clerestory windows recalled the tones of some magnificent old Burgundy or Bordeaux.

Yet to get the feeling of the building I found myself sitting at the opening of one of the transepts, facing away from the nave which is Romanesque, earlier work, standing there like a grave and sober introduction to the wild flights of fourteenth-century Gothic—which in its broad design must have been one man's plan : and apparently no one knows who he was. This *Paradiso* has no named author. There grew up in my mind a feeling that the cathedral was not the stone and glass, but what



Archives Photographiques
LE MANS CATHEDRAL

is contained by them : as if the thing created were, physically, as well as morally, the atmosphere within. An artist like this annexes space as his raw material : he models in space as a sculptor in clay, but by an inverse process, enclosing his creation : he borders it with embroidery of design, he floods it with colour, but eventually what he has made when it is finished is a poem in space : space that for all its vastness is taught to have measure and proportion : that for all its simplicity and unity is capable of infinite subtilisation, fading away into recesses of roof, of ambulatory and side-chapels : capable too of endless division, into broad compartments of nave and transept, and in the enormous towering choir endlessly cut off and partitioned : yet everywhere, one ; fluid but defined, still, yet palpitating with movement ; the inner aspect of that living shape which was three hundred years in growing and for twice three centuries has remained in flower.

It is amazing to think that when this glory of France was in its growth, England owned Maine. Cœur de Lion's Berengaria has her tomb in the transept. Yet, in truth, neither was the England of that day England, nor the France of that day France. Europe was far more one in the days of chivalry, that international institution, than in the ages since nationalities grew up. That cathedral hardly expresses the France of to-day : it has the

In Praise of France

soul of mediæval Europe in it : but it is a live thing, not a dead one. And there hangs by its altar, I am sure, what is in almost all French churches since the war, a little tricolour with the sacred Heart emblazoned on it—symbol of an aspiration. France has had two religions since 1789, *Dieu et la Patrie* : this is an attempt to marry them—some think in defiance of nature. The little flag looked natural enough, at all events in the beautiful church of St. Serge at Angers, set against the creamy tones of vaulting, constructed when Henry II. was lord and master in Anjou.

III

MONTREUIL-SUR-MER

A HOLIDAY is measured by the amount of change you get into it, and since mine had to be of the shortest, it was a good piece of advice that sent me to Montreuil-sur-Mer. Forty hours : thirty of them across the water, and all but three or four of that thirty spent in a quaint, beautiful, characteristic, and little-known corner of France. Little known, for I rule out the war. Nothing could be less characteristic of itself than a French town in British occupation, and the many thousands of English-speaking folk who must have seen Montreuil while it was General Headquarters (from 1916 on) can, with all respect to them, know very little about the place as it is—can never have felt its atmosphere. What made my holiday so good, and so long, was a complete and delightful change of atmosphere.

Kent was enchanting that Easter Sunday, and to an Irishman's eyes almost as foreign as France, with the perfect spacing of exquisitely cared-for and lime-washed orchards, the aligned hop-gardens, the odd attractive oasthouse chimneys.

In Praise of France

Yet neither Kent nor any place in England could have given me the quickening strangeness which I found at Montreuil. Even in Kent one saw the whole country broken up by hedgerows, with purposeless timber growing at random on the fences and in the very pasture-fields—trees left there to stand till some night's storm or the mere decay of time should bring them to the fire. Kentish countryside was only a perfected example of what we are used to anywhere along the eastern Irish coast : you must cross the Channel to see the wholly different scenery which means a different culture—another way of ordering life.

Boulogne gave one time to lunch pleasantly ; but which of us in Boulogne can get away from crude memories ? Those quays will be always haunted by a phantom jostle of tired men in khaki hauling their heavy kit to the leave-boat, or—less tired but less cheerful—from it : and next door to where I ate my meal used to be the officers' club. Too many memories there, of friends one crossed, coming or going, and did not see again.

When the train started, France presented at first the spectacle of Cockney vulgarities in building worse than any which England perpetrates. The French have a way of using ironwork about villas so that it resembles the frilling in some picture-paper's delineation of a cocotte's under-

clothes. Then came Etaples and the abomination of desolation along those sand-dunes with disused munition-makers' huts : they cannot all be converted into hen-houses, I suppose, but one was—a blessed transformation. It was good, also, to see at a foundry near Boulogne vast heaps of rusty barbed-wire in rolls, poisonous stuff on its way to become some clean useful piece of metal.

Beyond Etaples we seemed to be traversing ordinary undulating country, for only a quick eye would detect an ancient tideway in the valley of the Canche, up which the line to Arras runs from Etaples junction ; and Montreuil-sur-Mer came on me as a surprise, in the middle of tillage. Also, I had not expected to see a fortress. From the station a broad flight of steps cut across a steep zigzag of the main road ; then at the next turning a gateway tunnelled through the huge brick wall of rampart, and instantly there came the shock of delight at seeing an old, old, little street climbing straight up, with houses whose lines are all bulged and budged by time. That also crossed a zigzag, and from the top of it the Grande Rue led on through the town, between houses, many of them old and all of them pleasant. Then on the left was a little mall, with trees breaking into green, and beyond it, what I had been told to look for—the Hôtel de France.

It was not an hotel at all, however, but an old-

In Praise of France

fashioned inn built about a courtyard full of tables, on which guests had left such a profusion of bottles and glasses as gave good promise of hospitality. I got a room for rather fewer francs than you would pay shillings in England, left my pack, and went out upon the ramparts—anxious chiefly to find the sea. Not a sign of it. The nearest salt water is now at Paris-Plage, ten kilometres as the crow flies ; and in that sunny haze of north-easterly weather nothing was clear. But what filled one's eye was the fortress : complete, and almost modern : to-day no doubt no better than a shell-trap, but even in Crimean times an awkward place to tackle. How did it get there ? What was it for ? Even admitting that the Canche was once a sea-way, Montreuil was never a port of landing when such works as these were constructed. Putting General Headquarters there was like quartering Lord Jellicoe in one of Nelson's three-deckers, an odd mixture of fitness and unfitness. But I had to wait for my answer till next day, and then got it basking in the sun on the ramparts, while I read in a local guide-book what I now set down.

When France really began to be France, and not a mere huddle of disputed principalities, Montreuil was its northern outpost. You still enter from the station from the north through the Porte de Boulogne : but near where the Hôtel de

France keeps a memory of its name, you issued formerly southwards through the Porte de France. That was the way into France from Ponthieu and the Boulonnais—always debatable land between the rulers of France and the rulers of Flanders, whether they happened to be Burgundian, Austrian, or Spanish. It was Vauban himself who gave Montreuil its final shape, and the mould of his plan remains intact, except where the Porte de France has been demolished—a regrettable concession to convenience. You can follow the patrol's track all round the rampart: and the town has on it the character which nothing can give but this age-long seclusion behind a material barrier.

In the Middle Ages town and country did not merge into one another gradually, as now: they were sharply separated: and Montreuil preserves better than any place in Great Britain the character of a mediæval town. Others in France resemble it. But where, as in Vézelay, the mediæval type remains complete, all is dark, narrow, and intricate. In Montreuil I met a spacious disposition of streets and houses which added to its charm in the spring sun. Three thousand people have large elbow-room there. Once it boasted of 30,000, but in those days it was a town built of wood. That older Montreuil came to a savage ending, when it ceased to be mediæval.

In Praise of France

Modern civilisation may in a sense be said to begin with the invention of artillery, since that put an end to the day of petty rulers, each impossibly ensconced in his castle. War became a luxury for great monarchs, and nations instead of tribes or principalities went at each other. When the Emperor Charles the Fifth, a man of the newer type, wanted to push outwards from Artois and take in all Picardy, Montreuil stood a siege of six weeks valiantly. That was in 1522. But in 1537 the Imperial troops came again, under Egmont, Count de Buren, 30,000 strong, and having artillery. In half an hour walls built only to stand battering-ram or catapult had a breach in them. The garrison got leave to march out with the honours of war, but when they had departed the place was sacked, burnt, and became a desert. Francis the First had to bribe people to reinhabit it, behind new fortifications, on which 4,000 men were at work when war broke out afresh in 1542. Two years later de Buren was before it again with 40,000 men, but the new works—very largely those which you now see—had been designed to meet gunnery, and for three months the place prolonged its resistance till peace relieved it. From that day on Montreuil was never directly engaged in war : though in 1689 Vauban, making a chain of works to defend the territory which France had acquired in Flanders from the Spani-

ards, thought it worth while to bring this fortress up-to-date as a part of his second defence line.

What remains of it to-day is used much as are the hulks for naval cadets. Where a bridge crosses the wide deep fosse to what was the citadel, a notice forbids entrance. I imagined a magazine : but here was only the abode for officials of the Ecole Militaire—a big barrack devoted to educating *enfants de troupe*, children born while their parents are on the strength of some regiment, and trained with a view to becoming professional non-commissioned officers.

Montreuil has also its civil Ecole Supérieure, and is a considerable centre for education. A good many buildings that were ecclesiastical have been annexed for the purpose. Others were destroyed in the Revolution, for the place went Red, and wanted to get rid of its name. Montreuil, or Monstrueil, is *Monasteriolum*, and recalls that a little monastery, founded by Salvius, or St. Saulve, in the seventh century, was the first settlement on this hillock ; whereas in 1793 they desired to show their approval of the Montagnards by becoming Montagne-sur-Mer. However, Saint Saulve won, and his church still dominates the town. But St. Austreberthe's chapel is now a club or common-room for secondary teachers. I hope the lady feels that this scroll-topped piece of squat Picard architecture might easily be worse

In Praise of France

employed. Her name has something practical and housewifely about it : I picture her in the image of a certain solid capable Mother Superior, who, in addition to running a hospital, an orphanage, a school, and other subsidiary appliances, used to provide officers during the war with excellent meals and hot baths, just away from the line. She indeed was Belgian, by a matter of two miles : but Belgian or Picard, what is the racial difference ?

That Low Country type has contributed a good deal to the amalgam which we call France. Montreuil is not quintessential French, like Tours or Angers, but French it is—a French town, full of the life of little *rentiers*, retired officers, *huissiers*, school-teachers, and other simple people, terribly anxious about the dwindling franc : looking out from its walls across vast undulating stretches of tillage, where nothing but a road here and there breaks the leisurely curves of ground, on which heavy lumbering horses drag plough and harrow for slow-moving phlegmatic Picard farmers. The day to know Montreuil would be a Saturday, when it is the market-place for that rich district.

But merely to see it, Easter-time was good enough for me. Sun streamed down upon the ramparts, and the townspeople were out there taking their pleasure : black-robed women, somehow very mediæval and appropriate ; wise deliberate elderly men, whose ancestors were prob-

ably burghers when the town-levy had to help man the walls. Very few of the important buildings gave me any special pleasure : but the tiled roofs were a joy all of these two sunny days : whether you looked on a mass of them, huddled inconceivably close where the old town ran down to the waterway (a portion which the restricted wall of 1542 left outside its ring), or saw them singly, each by itself, a sheet of rich mottled colour for which I tried many comparisons. Where the old tiles had been patched and cemented together with repointing, the effect was like that of some very old Persian rug, low in tone : and it was curious to observe how even new roads were being graded down by the weather in that moist air into a sober harmony with the rest. But chance showed me a much closer resemblance. Outside the citadel some of the great elms which grow on the ramparts had been felled, and the trunks lay there in the sun, the rough bark crevassed with innumerable fissures, and the dull white where the branches had been lopped making patches already subdued in tone by the exuding sap. To run your eye from these up to the old roofs beyond them was to carry it through a series of gradations, in which colour and texture alike were of a piece. It was as if this town, once all woodwork, had never wholly got away from the associations of shingling. Against this quiet rich-

In Praise of France

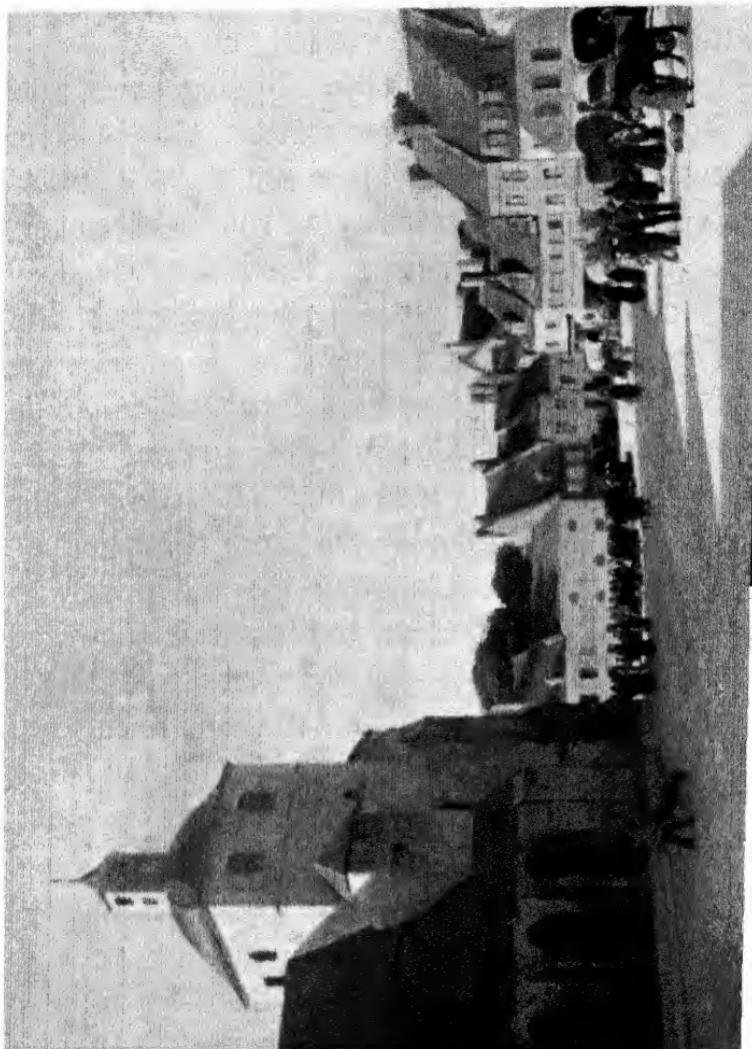
ness every here and there stuck out some piece of yellow wallflower, and brought the note of spring across the buildings as clearly as the green buds called it among rugged trunks.

Outside the walls, where slipping earth gave shrubs a foothold on the rampart, sloe blossom was a delicate mist of white : and on the eastward face, where a little watercourse runs in the valley, there was a hazel thicket. Here I heard the deep chuckle of a nightingale, trying his throat, and after dark I walked the ramparts, hoping for the full song ; but it was too cold or too early : an owl screeched, and down below a strong-lunged frog croaked like a water bird. Up there in the dark one got amazingly the sense of separation. To the left, narrow lanes ran into the town, with lampions here and there, and lighted windows, all safe and snug : to the right, 200 feet below, misty and dark, was the unwalled and unenclosed —that which the town walls had to guard against.' An officer passing alone on the ramparts, and later, a soldier—the only two persons I met—increased the feeling that one was still in a defended fortress.

Another time, perhaps, I may go back to Montreuil and explore it in detail : but for that little holiday, sunlight and the pervading strangeness sufficed me. I never basked more pleasantly than on its ramparts in the sun ; I never ate in surroundings more to my liking than in the inn's

From a painting by Dermot O'Brien, P.R.H.A.

MONTRÉUIL-SUR-MER : MARKET PLACE



dining-room, on the sanded floor, looking into the courtyard. Vines on the walls were trained over the whole court in a net, and the buds on the hard cordage shone in the sunlight, and brought the spring's quickening in among those walls. Nothing is knottier or more gnarled than the vine trunk : incredible that from it should issue what in all vegetable nature is most delicate, most tender, and most precious—the sun-warmed grape. The French peasant stock is like that—here in Picardy, at its roughest and toughest : yet what fruit it yields ! Even in Picardy they have what makes the vital difference between Northern France and Southern England—just the extra share of sun. The *volets* everywhere on the houses tell of it : so does the burnished patina on the roofs. As I sat and drank my coffee there, a high roof with two rows of mansard windows faced me, all sparkling in the spring air : everything was so clear, so clean, so sharp : the court between its four sides was a little well full of sunlight : you could dip a pail into it. France gave me sunlight to drink that Easter-time.

And though the hotel rooms were full of English guests, it was not tourist-ridden. A Frenchman could come in without feeling that he intruded. They came indeed very constantly, for the place is at a great road junction : the Route Nationale from Arras meets here the Route Nationale from Paris

In Praise of France

to Boulogne. But your motorist is always in a hurry. Let him scorch ahead and leave to quiet unhurried people the enjoyment of quiet unhurried places like Montreuil-sur-Mer. Such folk, when they have had their fill and depart satisfied, can observe from a leisurely train how a tapestry of cultivated fields and willows and poplar trees masked from them, as they came, the flatness of the old sea floor, where the tideway, now silted up, carried the Vikings and their ships to sack the monastery of St. Saulve some thirteen centuries ago. Even in these times, high springs force the water up the Canche till they stop the little mills working, and remind Montreuil that it once was on the sea.

IV

MARTIN EGLISE AND ARQUES

THE Younger Generation and I crossed over from Eastbourne in the morning and waited in Dieppe for the lady whom we call Humility. Dieppe is a good place to wait in, for it is not only seaside but seafaring. You can stand any morning on the quay and see the trawlers landing their catch, fish of all sorts being bundled ashore pell-mell in the crates ; for the modern steam-trawl is a terrible implement, and sweeps in not only the bottom-haunting flat fish, but herring and mackerel and whatever else swims near the surface. Then on the quay head the catch is sorted out and loaded into hand trucks. Dieppe, unlike most English ports, does not send away its fish by rail and get them back a couple of days later. The hotels and restaurants have their buyers on the quays ; and there is the fish market, an enchanting place, where the fishwives behind their stalls spread out before them all varieties of fish and shell-fish from langoustes to cockles, including much that Great Britain despises—skate, for instance—and some that we repudiate, such as the blue and spotted

In Praise of France

dog fish.—Why? Because they are coarse feeders? So are all fish. Nobody despairs a sea trout, and I have caught them choked up to the throat with slugs.

It is another reason for staying in Dieppe that everywhere in France people cook indifferent fish admirably; but here they have the pick of the trawl: and the Dieppe sole is illustrious. Yet it is more interesting to see what they can do with coarse stuff, and I ate *colin à la Dieppoise*, asking myself all the time what *colin* was. Hake, of all tasteless things; but in Dieppe they diffuse through its flabby substance the flavour of fresh mussels.

Next morning the sun remembered it was the month of June, and the Place Nationale, which had been so empty and wind-swept, was crowded with the jolly assemblage of market booths, and the light of bargain hunting was in both my companions' eyes. Perhaps that is not quite fair. Both are reputed gardeners, and the *marché aux fleurs* was a joy even to the less professionally interested. Also, the sight of wares attractively spread out is an intoxicant for Humility: I have seen her eyes shine suddenly, as if a switch had been turned on, when she entered an Italian grocer's shop in London. Still, when the franc is over seventy-five—as it had just begun to be—every lady knows that you simplify by reckoning

Martin Eglise and Arques

the five-franc note as a shilling ; and it becomes an economy to buy anything you see. They meant buying, and I left them to it and proceeded about my own business.

The best tackle shop said that I could get a trout-fishing permit for five francs a day, and since even by my standard that was only 1s. 6d., I paid the preliminary outlay. Much hung on this. We were uncertain whether to take our holiday at Berneval, which is a village with a plage, or in the Forêt d'Arques. But when I learnt that my rights on the water began at a place called Martin Eglise, which was on the borders of the forest and had an attractively named hotel, I settled everything out of hand, and went to tell the weaker sex of my resolution.

They were in the *marché*, embracing armfuls of blue shirts, pottery, cherries, pinks, and other bargains. I imparted my discovery. Humility, with the deference which shows that she knows that she is right, asked me to look up the paper of directions she had given me. Sure enough, there was Martin Eglise inscribed upon it—and the Clos Normand. We settled to drive out after *déjeuner*. Then we mentioned the *pâtisserie*, where by our host's recommendation we had dined on a good plain family meal. The restaurants he said, were inclined to *exagérer*. Humility was still deferential, but it was legible on her coun-

In Praise of France

tenance that she had not come to France to eat family meals ; and once more she demanded the paper. On it was written the Restaurant Boeldieu. We found it. The place was small, perfectly appointed : in the middle was a table set out with quantities of fresh fruit and a few plates of exquisitely clean food : everybody about it had not only charming manners but personal distinction, and the most distinguished of them was the grey-haired *patron*, whom we could see in the shining kitchen delicately arranging the dishes of which he was the author and executant. Humility was not arrogant, but you could see her purr as each good thing was followed by better. That meal was cheaper than the pâtissier's : it cost half a crown a head.

A sober horse took us in three-quarters of an hour to Martin Eglise—a village having cottage gardens almost as good as if they were in England. I set that down because Humility said it, and there is therefore one thing that in her judgment they do not manage better in France. Certainly the houses and villages about this part of Normandy are less different from those across the Channel than anything else which can be called French. But I have never seen anything in England like the Clos Normand.

The central building, plain and quiet with its timbered front of faded red brick, has been, what

Martin Eglise and Arques

it still calls itself, an *auberge* for many generations. But beyond this is a new frontage, two *pavillons* with an open space between them : and all this, *pavillons*, spaces, and the gateways at each end, are roofed over with thatch. Inside is the *clos*, a wide space planted with apple trees set so close that their boughs make a covering over all the little tables and chairs of whitened metal that are dotted about ; and where the tables and chairs stop, is a swift-running little river rapidly escaping from the prison of a mill dam.

Of course I walked straight to it while the other people were settling about our rooms. The water was discoloured but fishable ; so leaving the womenfolk to keep each other company, I got out my rod at once. In other parts of France I had failed ignominiously to catch trout ; and though the stream looked perfect in that long stretch of grass below the bridge, I was surprised and profoundly grateful for the recognition when a trout acknowledged me with a rise, and jubilant when another actually took. It was about the size of a small herring, but I stood on no ceremony for measure ; and by the time blue apparitions came sauntering down the bank to look for me, I could produce half a dozen—a very sufficient dish for dinner.

A saturnine waiter brought them in, cooked *à la meunière*, as part of the excellent meal we ate in a

In Praise of France

pavillon ; for the evening was chilly—so chilly that no trout would rise after dark. But we all went to bed feeling that we had been providentially guided, and next morning the sun shone so vehemently that there was no possible doubt. We consumed our coffee together on the balcony in admired dishabille, and then the Younger Generation went to church and stayed for a prodigious time. She came back reporting that there was a kind of baby show in progress, with perambulators parked in mass outside the church door : and so we all went off to see.

It was a yearly fête ; all the village was gay and crowded : there was a pilgrimage to the little old church whose sides bulge precariously wherever they have not been shored up ; and all the infants for miles round were brought in to be blessed ceremonially at the altar, to make them well if they are sick, and to keep them well if they are not sick. The priest, patient man, had been at it since five o'clock in the morning, and at twelve they still kept straggling in by ones and twos ; children and parents kneeling together for the benediction, while devout ladies handed out *pain bénit*, and the little flaxen-haired acolytes ran back and forward scouting to report if any more babies were arriving. The Younger Generation, who is used to Irish informalities of devotion in out-of-the-way places, said she had never seen so conversational a service.

Martin Eglise and Arques

The church itself, without beauty, had the same friendly character. Of its two parallel naves, one has half disappeared : they speak of bombardment during the battle of Arques. Anyhow half is gone, and the end which remains is used for a sacristy. In the body of the surviving nave is a written record recalling epochs in the church's history since the ninth century, when an Archbishop of Rouen gave lands and mill to the clergy of the parish. St. Louis passed here. So did Jeanne d'Arc, a prisoner in the hands of the English. These events, and the battle of Arques, are recalled not only by inscription on the roll : there are commemorative pictures, showing St. Louis on his horse, the Maid, poor soul, in a cart, and Henry of Navarre standing with white plume to watch his culverins knocking bits out of the nave from across the river.

But these scenes are recalled out of loyalty to the long past : very plainly the devout and simple-minded priest who was responsible quite recently for these decorations had other things at heart. This parish had its martyr in the revolution. An abbé, then teaching children somewhere near-by, refused to take the oath of allegiance laid down by the Assembly : he became a hunted man, "on the run" from house to house, celebrating mass in the forest, until finally gendarmes of the Republic unearthed him in an alcove, and

In Praise of France

he was taken to Dieppe to die on the scaffold. There must be scores of such stories now half forgotten, but here at Martin Eglise is a determination to keep them alive in memory. A series of pictures, muddled and squalid in colour, weak in drawing, yet strong by intensity of feeling, throws on to canvas the various stages in that pilgrimage to the guillotine. No primitive was ever simpler in his methods : but the primitive of to-day lacks the clear-singing mediæval colour, and the pictures are ugly. Yet they present, they vivify, they recall. There is a study of the captured priest before his plebeian judges, and a much larger picture of what happened at the guillotine, which moved me like some old cartoon of Rowlandson or Gillray. Perhaps it is just as well to be reminded what a revolution looks like to those who are not on its side.—I noticed that one of the marking dates set down for memory in the church history was the *confiscation des biens de l'Eglise* in 1904.

Normandy, on the whole, is on the side of the Church, and that Sunday morning Martin Eglise was crowded with pious infants all Sundayfied (one must make a word for *endimanchés*), who after the ceremony strayed down into the village, where very secular booths offered their attractions. Outside one stall of toys kept by gipsies was a wistful gathering of children with ribbons in their buttonholes, fresh from being blessed. At the

Martin Eglise and Arques

stall's end was a heap of balls, costing presumably as much as twopence each, and on top of the heap sat a gipsy brat, imperfectly washed, in no way Sundayfied or blessed, but sturdy master of his possessions, filling his two arms with balls, tossing them up and scattering them : while all the time the little pagan watched out of the corner of his eye those sanctified infants who had no balls to play with. Ragged, disreputable little millionaire.

We came in then to our first meal beside the running water. Tables were set in a wide space of shade ; but here by the water the sun flecked it, and opposite was a sunny paddock sparsely planted with apple trees, on which grazed a white horse and the most adorable calves. There was also a stack of faggots, its purple-brown glowing in the sun—more delightful even than any hayrick. Up-river, the mill race made its lovely irruption into water that was still by comparison ; and away in the distance was a long vista of meadows and heavy tranquil cattle in the valley, and to the right the lovely skyline of enclosing ridge with its saddle of forest. Over our heads clouds of high-reaching poplar towered up lisping and whispering. And on our little table was a whole procession of simple excellent things to eat. Elsewhere I suppose one may meet as good *hors d'œuvre* : but out of Normandy there is no such

In Praise of France

butter, and the bread deserved it. If this should sound greedy, let it be remembered that Humility's mission is to develop the artistic feeling from what we eat and drink ; and the Younger Generation and I were her obsequious disciples.

That was a busy afternoon for the waiters : half Dieppe crowded out to assist at the fête : the road to the station was crowded as Fleet Street when we strolled out that way to look at a *vieux manoir*. But it was slack for the cooks, and when we came back to tea one of them, white-robed and mitred, was dodging among the trees while a damsels pelted him. Indeed, most of my visions of the Clos keep at least one chef in them. We had three, the restaurant over the way had at least one more, and the spread of British influence was indicated by the number of times we saw these mediæval figures kicking a football in the road. Nothing is so mediæval as a chef's uniform except a nun's, or a monk's, if you will ; but even in Ireland the monastic habit is rarely seen, whereas the chef's costume seems universal in Europe wherever there is cookery to count with. Who devised it, and when ? Our expert, though deeply read in the literature of her mission, threw no light : and so we adjourned to the forest.

About a quarter-mile of dusty road uphill took us to its edge, and then suddenly, as if we had crossed a threshold, we were admitted into a

Martin Eglise and Arques

vast amphitheatre under a green canopy supported by tall slender columns of silver-grey. The Forêt d'Arques is mostly beechwood, and no other tree shuts out the light so completely ; but the leaf, still young and tender, let a green radiance through. Only where there is perfect forestry could you get that effect of a huge tent. There was no undergrowth, no sideway branches to break the line of the trunks : and the shape of the ground, rising steeply, made a limit to the enclosure before us, while behind us the lighted edge marked us off again. We climbed and we walked, and I was very soon aware that without the sunlight in heaven I should have already lost my bearings. A forest in France is a forest in good earnest : this one holds wild boar for the prize of sportsmen : and I saw a roe far off go scampering between the trunks.

Festivities were over when we got back, and a fatigued staff were refreshing themselves. Our gloomy attendant declined to regard the influx of custom as matter for congratulation. “*Des clients pas très intéressants,*” he said contemptuously. His choice of words always pleased. Before taking away each course, where an English waiter might say, “Quite finished, sir,” his formula was always laconic, “Terminé ?” Latin, marble’s language. Humility interested herself in the sad gentleman, and after her custom proceeded

In Praise of France

to explore his life history. *A propos* of the pilgrimage of babies, she learnt that his wife was a Breton. The next move was plain, and he, if you please, was Angevin from the town of Angers itself. We competed in admiration of that delightful city, and raced each other with recollections. I mentioned the romantic buildings, but she, with ecstasy, recalled the *crêmets* one eats in the Café de l'Entr'acte; and she won hands down. From that moment the Angevin was a changed creature, wreathed in smiles, lyrical about the white wine of his own country and the gaiety and good-fellowship of its people. Not like the Normans he said, who are *batailleurs* in their cups.

That day I had left the trout alone, for the bank was crowded with fishers, one or two of whom used the fly skilfully, but the majority had a bunch of worms tied on to the end of a long pole, which they plunged into the river bed, and then sat down to await developments. After all, worms grow just as naturally on a stick as on a string, and somebody had got a two-pounder somehow the previous day, for I saw it in the hotel ice box. And although this plunging of poles might seem likely to disturb everything, I got a little real fishing that night. Nothing would move till I put up a black alder, and then came three small ones, herring size, one after the other. Then I hooked something much stronger, and while I was wondering how

Triquet de Montis, Dieppe

THE CLOS NORMAND



Martin Eglise and Arques

to get him without a landing net, he settled the question by breaking away. But I soon got the fellow to him, say three-quarters of a pound, and it was so dark I could not see my line to lift him discreetly, and I swung him out at a venture. Of course, I thought the same fly would kill as well next evening. Illusion. I caught a couple more of the small things, and put them contemptuously back, determined to keep nothing that was not a credit to me. If I got no more to keep, I have convinced myself by experiment that trout can be taken with the fly in France ; and that completes its perfection as the place for holidays, especially if you get off the beaten track.

Next day, when the Younger Generation and I sadly despatched Humility by the boat from Dieppe, it was some comfort to return in a charabanc by way of Berneval, and be quite assured that we had done well to neglect all plages and cliffs for the forest and rivers inland.

We set about exploring them seriously in order to understand what really happened at the famous battle of Arques, which settled (in 1589) that Henry of Navarre should be King of France. A road skirting the forest took us under the shadow of beech boughs to the top of the jutting ridge which divides the valley of Martin Eglise's stream, the Eaulne, from that of the Béthune, which is the river of Arques. Here was an open space, a view

In Praise of France

point, and on the slope below in the pasture rose the obelisk that is supposed to show where the Béarnais stood during the battle. And certainly from it one could see all the meanderings of the two streams to where they met in the flat below us. On the right, up the Eaulne valley, Martin's Church was in sight, and on our left we had Arques and the crouched bulk of its château. But I found it very hard to believe what the local guide book told me—that cannon from the Château d'Arques decided the battle by cutting handsome lanes in the Leaguers' ranks. What was the range of gunfire in 1589?

Two things, however, were clear about the battlefield. The present road from Martin Eglise to Arques along the low ground is of quite recent construction : and that low ground has been manifestly at one time part of the sea floor.

It was a day of sweltering heat, and Arques, which lay below us, showed all the unattractive features of a modern industrial town : its factory of artificial silk has developed at an amazing pace since the war, and a crop of new little red houses is springing up on the slope from forest to river. I would have gone no nearer it, but the Younger Generation happily was insistent. We noticed as we went down that the artisans' dwellings are all being put up by the silk company, and are being built, flimsily perhaps, but with considerable

Martin Eglise and Arques

taste ; and in the flat marsh a space of several acres is laid out in a grove of young poplar trees, each of which will be worth money to the commune ; and the causeway across the valley, an ugly thing in itself, is being transformed to beauty by plantation of trees along it, lime and purple-leaved sycamore alternating with the telegraph posts. In short, amenity is studied in this manufacturing centre, just as we had observed it to be at Eastbourne : but would an English manufacturing centre have been as careful in such matters as a well-run watering place ?

Once across the railway and the main road to Rouen, the ground rises, and you reach the old town and its surprising church. The master mason Nicholas Bédiou, who began it in 1515, was no common artist. Seen from without, the chancel with its high-pitched roof, curved like the hull of a modern racing yacht, is amazing in its audacious beauty : and seen from within, the choir that he made is a miracle. Daylight streams in from everywhere : you could keep a sunny garden inside that exquisite high-reaching stonework : he has got far away from the gloom of early Gothic. But I suppose the money gave out : his design stops short in the transepts, and the nave is carried out on a wholly different plan, so much lower that his lovely church comes down through the ages with a broken back. I cannot

In Praise of France

think that Nicholas Bédiou is comfortable in paradise.

If only one knew the history, the real history, of that church ! I believe it would show that about 1530, Dieppe, then at the top of its prosperity, resented the spending of so much money upon an obsolete place like Arques. The Dieppois were busy just then transmogrifying the old Norman church of St. Jacques into the piece of flamboyant Gothic that we see to-day, and probably wanted all they could get for it. There is an old rivalry between the towns ; and it survives to-day, as I discovered.

For when we had refreshed ourselves outside the door of a café at the top of the steeply sloping place of Arques, and climbed the farther ascent into the château, we met an intelligent Frenchman. He was the official guide to the building, and, as usual, a *mutilé de la Guerre* : France uses these jobs to provide for her pensioners. But I had not realised before how much pains the department in charge of the *Monuments Historiques* takes to fit them for their employ. They do not always profit greatly by it ; but this man's talk was full of references to things he had been told in lectures—subjects lying far beyond a guide's obligatory knowledge. When a man has a thing to do, he should interest himself in it, he said. The truth is, such a man as he could do no other.

Martin Eglise and Arques

That strong intelligence, cut away from its normal uses in life, stranded in a backwater, had fallen ravenously to work on whatever presented itself. I put to him my conjecture that Arques had probably been a seaport in its day, like Montreuil-sur-Mer or Winchelsea : and it was then I learned about the jealousy. Arques, he said, had been a place of importance long before Dieppe was anything, but, of course, no Dieppois would admit that. To him who was neither Arquois nor Dieppois, but a Parisian, one fact seemed conclusive. The Château of Dieppe dates only from the fifteenth century, but this great fortress at Arques was built by the Conqueror's elder kinsman, Guillaume le Talou.

I am doubtful whether there was a serious waterway to Arques in the time of the Conqueror ; but anybody looking down on that level space can see where the tide once was ; and we all know that in the time of Scandinavian sea supremacy ships were shallow bottomed, and pushed as far as they could into estuaries. The old camp or city whose relics they trace on the cliff above Dieppe did not belong to any folk whose main business was seafaring ; and Dieppe itself, I am sure, dates from the later period, when the sail had almost completely replaced the oar. Even in the Conqueror's time, nobody wanted a deep-water port. Possibly by that time the estuary up to Arques

In Praise of France

may have been mostly turned into marsh ; but—exactly as at Montreuil—the old town at the head of the tideway was already an important centre with buildings and defence works too costly to abandon, and therefore they were enlarged. Long before the battle of Arques was fought, Dieppe and not Arques was the true centre of that region ; but Arques was still the stronghold, and the battle of Arques pivoted on it.

It was a pleasure to be told about that battle by a man who knew what war is, and whose natural intelligence had been fully informed. Arques was a two-day fight. The Leaguers came from the direction of Eu, near Tréport. They were decisively superior in numbers. But Henry had crossed the valley opposite Arques, and entrenched his forces from the edge of the forest down to the level, which was then impassable marsh, his trench line running where the obelisk now stands. The Leaguers, advancing from Martin Eglise, attacked this position, which was supported by a couple of culverins, and they could not force the entrenchment. The forest must have been too dense to be traversable in those days, or they could have turned his flank. Heavily damaged, they fell back. Henry withdrew his own body of troops to the Château d'Arques, but sent a detachment out in the direction of Dieppe. Next day the Leaguers made a direct attack on the

Martin Eglise and Arques

Château d'Arques itself, but its walls were too hard for them ; and as they retired in disorder towards Dieppe along the west bank of the valley, Henry's flanking contingent fell on them and inflicted a third repulse. As to the story of the cannon deciding the battle, this ex-mitrailleur was entirely incredulous. Culverins could throw a bullet 2,000 yards, he said ; but if they made openings in the ranks, these were produced by the disappearance of people who ran away at the noise.

Seen in that way, the story became intelligible, and after a good deal of such conversation it did not seem an impertinence to ask our guide about the accident which had left him without a leg. It was at Soissons, he said, in 1918, his third wound ; he would much rather it had been his first. He did not profess to have enjoyed the war, through four years of which he had served as a machine gunner. But he was wearing three ribbons : not many people in France have more than two. The only one I recognised was the Croix le Guerre. He had seen a great deal of the English troops, and, indeed, had lost his leg with Gough's Fifth Army. Gough had been among the visitors whom he had shown round the château ; and I note that this very acute soldier had nothing to say against Gough's leadership. Also he knew our Irish regiments which were in the Fifth Army.

In Praise of France

And so we went on to talk with the familiarity of those who have friends in common.

He did not dislike his billet, but in the winter, he said it was terribly lonely : no shopkeeper in the town would send up provisions : and they were marooned there, with the wind among the old walls, and the big owls and the little owls, *hiboux* and *chouettes*, hooting and screeching all night in every corner. I should be sorrier for him if I had not seen his wife, the bright-faced, quick-footed, courteous lady who runs to let visitors in. They looked like good comrades, able to face together worse than the war has brought to them. Perhaps their French thrift may earn them the means to move into some less unsocial way of living. It would soon do so if people paid at its worth for the privilege of being so guided, as they are there, to a place of extraordinary interest. This man's talk about the system of underground ways, which according to him connected these feudal fortresses at the height of their power, was a thing to remember. One could, I suppose, also get him to talk in detail about history that is not ancient.

That is to me the great charm of France in these years. We move among a people with whom we shared a tremendous and devastating adventure ; yet our experience differed very greatly from theirs.

An agreeable photographer from Dieppe, who found the Younger Generation and me sitting over our *déjeuner* by the river bank and tempted us to commission a postcard, had a great deal to say. His story concerned a moment in the siege of Verdun when the garrison had run out of shell, and he, a motor driver, had got through with a load. It sounded almost too like a cinema invention to be quite credible, but there was nothing in it that was not true to the nature of this war and to French nature. It implied throughout, and unconsciously implied, that French soldiers, unlike ours, had a general knowledge of what was happening : and even that France as a whole followed, not in detail but with a pretty accurate sense, the moves of the long game. The average British household knew racking anxiety concerning its own men : France had that, and had the greater anxiety as well.

Also, France is still under arms. When I went to meet the night boat at Dieppe, I asked some question of the sentry on duty by the customs barrier. No voice can be more cultivated than the voice that answered me ; here was the son of some good family in blue coat and red trousers on this kind of policeman's guard, in the normal course of things. The soldier in France is not distinct from the nation even while he is a soldier, and the nation does not and cannot stand apart from its

In Praise of France

soldiers, as England did before the war, and almost does again to-day.

Another aspect of France showed in our photographer. A very pleasant boy of fourteen or so was with him, and questions about his schooling loosed a stream of talk. We learnt how the boy had won his scholarship, and what courses it would enable him to follow, so that he might be a man available for many purposes. That was what they had to do : to provide men to renew the wastage. Almost every French parent will talk to you with this detached and purposeful application about education. The anxiety is not to find jobs for their children, but to get them fit to do the work that is everywhere short of hands. Lucky for France in a way : but there is another side to it. Things get done in France only because people are working and earning who in England would not be doing either : and a good many things do not get done because there are not enough hands. We saw an instance.

The Younger Generation is by profession a market gardener, and some of the equipment of her trade is made better in France : and she wanted to know how to get it. The leading chef took us to call on the gardener who supplied the Clos with a good deal of what it wanted. Well, we did not see him : the gentleman was asleep, after his *déjeuner*—and very proper too, since he

Martin Eglise and Arques

gets up at half-past four. His wife took us round, decidedly an old woman. The two keep the garden cultivated between them ; they are small *rentiers* who occupy themselves in this way, and in this way stand up against a falling franc. Apparently the best card in their pack is the little woodland strawberry, the *Quatre Saisons*, which yields fruit from the beginning of May to the end of September : it was everywhere. But the lady could not give us details about either *chassis* or *paillassons*, and we went on to look for a professional gardener who was said to have a magnificent *serre*.

He had, as a matter of fact, one of the untidiest gardens eye could behold, deep in weeds : and his *serre* was not much to brag of—a show-house, as the Younger Generation explained, not one made on business lines. He had bought it from some château, and put it up himself, but had not finished putting it up ; and his garden was weedy because he could get no labour. The silk factory outbid him for all the hands available ; and so there he was in this big place, carrying on his trade (chiefly of growing flowers in pots) with no helper in sight but a toy dog about the size of a squirrel. It was all makeshift ; yet plainly the worker knew his business. A tall, extremely gentle, high-nosed, spectacled man of forty, he was wholly unlike the traditional Frenchman : and he was manifestly amused beyond words by the

In Praise of France

idea of the Younger Generation as a professional rival.

This does not mean that he did not take her seriously. About *paillassons* (the straw screens that cover frames), he said that every gardener in France makes his own—it is a good occupation for the winter ; and he showed us his patch of rye growing. And there and then he got down some straw and proceeded to demonstrate the process. Between one thing and another time passed ; he was busy, and we apologised, but he said it was a pleasure to talk with people *du métier*, and he told us to come to his house that evening for addresses of people who supply the ironwork for *chassis*. So we came, and we saw the entire staff of that enterprise ; his wife, who helps as far as the household work permits, and his little girl of fifteen, who gives a hand after school hours. We talked about everything as well as gardening : we endeavoured to explain the Irish situation, a task which one could only simplify by saying it was too complicated to understand.

But the real focus of that conversation was the Younger Generation : the wife contemplated her with amazement, and asked repeatedly if *ces demoiselles* did the heavy work such as digging : and then concluded that the clay in Ireland must be much lighter, to which the Younger Generation indulgently agreed : but all the while the

little girl sat silently in a corner watching every movement, and at last in a pause of talk came a thin little voice, "*Quel âge avez-vous, Mademoiselle ?*" It appeared then that the man of the house had come back with tales of a flaxen-haired young lady of eighteen who was directing a great horticultural enterprise. It ended with a promise to send photographs of the Irish establishment, and I honestly believe they will be eagerly looked for.—Decent travellers bring something of interest as well as what they find, and it is a great pleasure when one can feel that, as we certainly did that evening among kind friendly people. The Younger Generation holds that France is a country of delightful women and clever but less likeable men : but on that day she had met two men who thoroughly won her approval.

She had even indulgence for another acquaintance that we found that afternoon at Ancourt, where we went to look at the stained glass. The church seemed to be shut, and I was making inquiries when a man came somewhat precipitately out of the village café to our assistance. Having found a side door open, we viewed the interior under the guidance of this pillar of the public-house. He was a mason, and observed with justice that the stonework on the capitals was beautiful, and that it was a shame to see the *dentelle* covered with whitewash ; it should be

In Praise of France

cleaned so as to show the fine cutting. But the chief burden of his song was his own repugnance to clerical interference and the confessional. There had to be a religion, it was good for children ; there must be an idea of authority, but the grown man did not want to be meddled with. No, certainly he would not send for a priest if he were dying ; he would take his chances.—I suppose it was by way of increasing their actuarial value that he dabbed himself profusely with holy water as he went out, recounting to us unedifying tales about the *cure's* of an adjacent parish. It ended (as he had foreseen accurately) in our drinking a *litre* of white wine together in the café.

The easiest place to get information about a country is in its public-houses over a drink, and from this source flows much of the knowledge which is retailed in print. Yet one public-house is dreadfully like another the world over. I do not feel that this acquaintance added much to our knowledge. But we really learnt something of France that was not on the surface when we heard our friend in the Château d'Arques describe his life in winter among the ruins and the screech owls, and the relief when summer brought for a couple of months faces to see and folk to talk to. Yet that was not normal or typical : it was simply the strongly marked individual shown in a setting

Martin Eglise and Arques

that gave value to his personality. Our gardener and his household were a better study, correcting, or at least modifying, one's sense of that hardness which seems to underlie much that is delightful in the French. There was nothing in these people that was not gentle. Industrious and capable they were, but never in any conceivable relation hard.

Still, for them also, life was yet hardly normal. It is not natural for people so trained to live and work in that scrambling way, as if they were pioneers in a jungle. They also are at the work of tidying up the world, of bringing back cultivation to what has been stamped over with beastly hoof marks.

Even out here, at Martin Eglise, far away from the battle zone, the whole valley bore traces. People told us how a town of 30,000 people had been raised in three months along the levels of the marsh, for munition workers and for a rest camp. The grassy slopes were still marked with the track of the concrete platforms ; but there was a stranger evidence.

Coming back from Arques, above the new artisans' dwellings, we saw a great white cross, and going to it found ourselves on British soil. But what an England ! In that battalion of grave-stones scarcely an English name : these were South African natives from a labour corps long quartered in the valley. Half the races of the

In Praise of France

world sent their contingents here : they are gone now, even the concrete platforms lifted ; nothing left of them but their graves : yet the track of their passage is on all the lives of all the people.

But you do not feel it as you sit at one of the tables at the *Clos Normand* and drink your wine or your cider and watch the people about you. What pleased us most was that the jolliest table of all was the one reserved for the staff, at the corner nearest the inn. Or when the weather was cold and the household ate within doors, I always felt that the best cheer in the place was on the long table in the middle of the big kitchen, which serves for office and for kitchen as well. It was a room that delighted the heart of Humility, who likes to see everything clean, but the kitchen more spotless than the rest : and its great array of copper dishes shone like a range of sunsets, and the old tiles behind the range, some of them a deep splendid purple, some a delicate blue, just gave to the whole that touch of the artist's inspiration which, she would maintain, no kitchen should lack.

V

IN BRILLAT-SAVARIN'S COUNTRY

THERE are a few people, a very few, on whose recommendation I would read anything and the lady whom we call Humility is one. She pressed Brillat-Savarin into my hands. What a difference it makes when a name that has been merely a symbol is changed into reality ! Like every one fit to pass what the Universities call a general knowledge test, I knew that Brillat-Savarin wrote on cookery ; but I mentally classed the *Physiologie du Goût* with Cavendish on Whist. I know now that Brillat-Savarin was a big jolly man, a keen sportsman, a reformer in days before the French Revolution, and, after the Revolution had taken and shaken him, a tenacious clinger to his job : and that his book ranks him not with Cavendish and other technical guides, but with Izaak Walton. He is typical of France as Izaak was typical of England ; and, like Izaak, he brings with him a feeling of the country as well as of the town. But what interested me most of all was to discover that Brillat-Savarin gave expression in words to an art which before him

In Praise of France

and since his day flourished with peculiar excellence in the remote corner of France where he was born—namely, in Belley, the capital of Bugey. Bugey and its neighbouring districts, La Bresse and Valromey, still constitute the region where, according to expert opinion, cookery reaches its highest perfection in all France. That is why I began to search the map for these places.

I found them embraced in the loop between Rhône and Saône. And since the whole district seemed full of lakes and rivers, and the literature abounded in reference to trout, that settled the matter for me : I decided to go ; and Humility said she would find a travelling companion and come too. Bourg, which is the old capital of La Bresse, was the handiest place for our meeting, since I would come from Switzerland and they from Paris.

Everybody knows the main line from Geneva to Paris : do they all, I wonder, feel as I did on that journey, and thank God when mountains stand a little way back so that you can look at them with comfort ? No view in Switzerland had pleased me so much as that from Culoz, on the edge of Valromey, and when we came to Virieu-le-Grand, I saw the valley leading down to Belley, and thought it a land of promise.

But impressions from train windows scarcely

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

count, and Brillat-Savarin's country began to be real to me at Ambérieu, where we changed.

Naturally I had in my pocket the volume of *La France Gastronomique*, which deals with Bugey and La Bresse, and MM. Rouff and Cournonsky spoke highly of an hotel at Ambérieu. But all stations in that country are apt to be remote from the place whose name they bear, and this hotel was two kilometres away : so, disappointed, I turned to the buffet, made my way to an unpretentious eating room, and was asked if I wanted *un petit repas*. I consented. The place was ugly as a prison—and as clean. Is it indecent to say that a big slice of melon suddenly set before me was a vision of delight and a fragrance of paradise after the stuffy train ? What came next was salmon and mayonnaise : I seem to see you getting salmon and mayonnaise at the refreshment room of any small English junction. There was also meat, exquisitely cooked, and either grapes or cheese to finish up with for my eight francs. I began to understand that what I had read about this country's standard of diet was not legendary, and went on hopefully to Bourg.

From Ambérieu the landscape changed sharply. At Culoz we had had our last view of distant mountains, some of them still bearing snow ; after that, the line ran through steep gorges clad with underwood. These outlying foothills of the

In Praise of France

Jura are all in Bugey : Brillat-Savarin was born among a race of mountaineers. But the chief glory of his table, the most substantial delicacy in every Bugeyssian menu, is furnished by the adjoining plain. A *poularde de Bresse* is France's equivalent for the Surrey fowl ; and though the fowls which La Bresse fattens have to be fetched a matter of 200 miles before Paris can appraise them, yet in Paris, as in Bourg or Belley, they rule the roast.

From Ambérieu to Bourg, all on our left, out towards Lyons, was a plain ; but on our right, at varying distances, were still the foothills, whose undulations subsided gradually and grew more gentle till, on reaching Bourg, one saw them three or four miles distant, rising in long slow slopes and contours almost as if they were the Sussex downs. Otherwise La Bresse seemed here as featureless and as little distinctive as any country I have seen in France.

Our party met on the platform at Bourg, by a piece of staff work too perfect to have been planned, and together we proceeded to the Hôtel de l'Europe which was much too good for the needs of any of us. Yet excellent rooms there with all the appliances cost the same as very bad ones in a fifth-class commis-voyageur hostelry in Paris, and we accepted the position. A little waiter, full of pathetic charm, encouraged us to embark at once upon a *poularde de Bresse*. According to the authorities,

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

certain farms can give their fowls a flavour as distinctive as that of a particular *clos* in wine : but the place of origin and pedigree of this chicken were not named to us. I admit it was a delicious fowl : but what stays in my mind was that we fought with each other for the last of a dish of carrots. M. Rébière, the chef and proprietor (a combination usual in Bresse and Bugey), gave us wonderful things to eat, but more wonderful was what he could get out of ordinary vegetables.

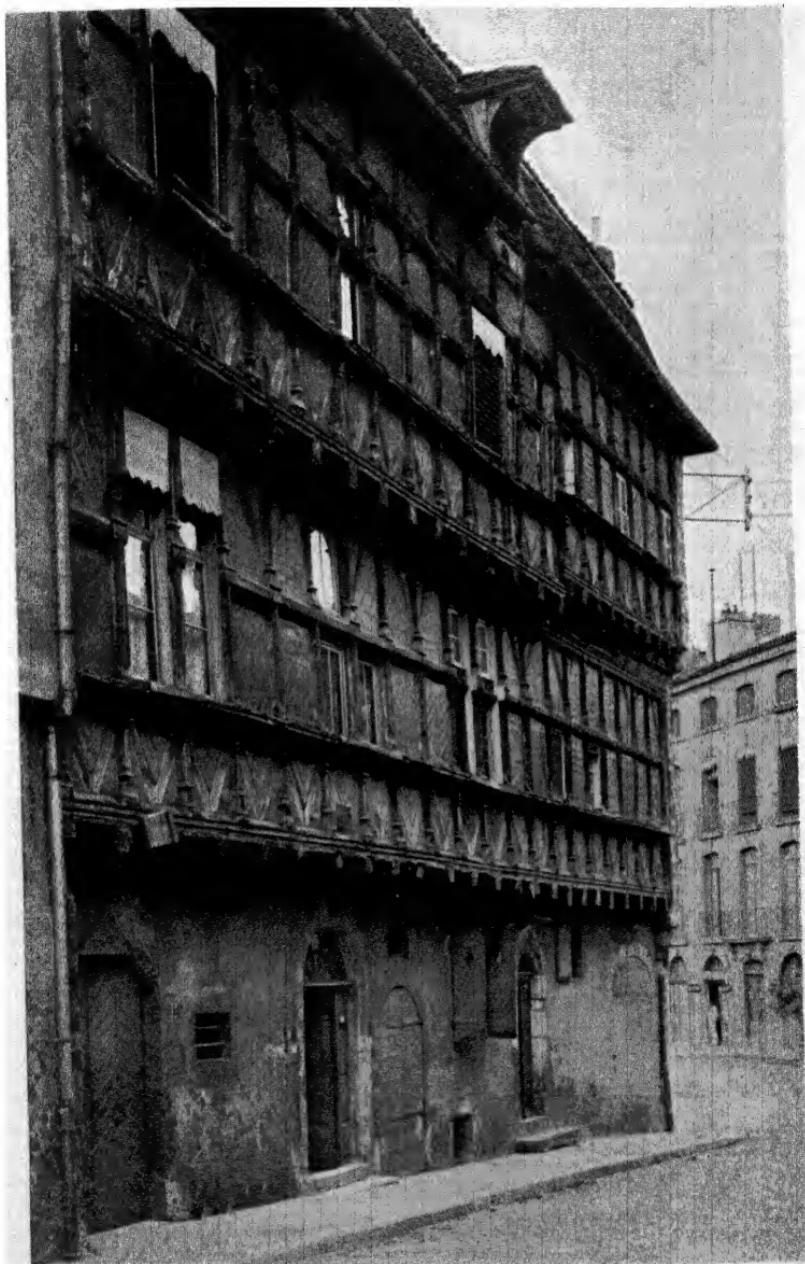
One rarity, however, must always for me be associated with Bourg : the crayfish, which from day to day our little waiter promised, till at last they came, *cardinalisées* as some one calls them. What a colour ! Scarlets and purples and crimsons all met and flamed in it, and for the rest of my life I shall be wondering whether I could not devastate the Shannon or the Corrib by getting a box of these creatures to fish with instead of the prawn. Colour attracts salmon : that is one of the only things we know about their taste, and these écrevisses would give the fish a new thrill.— Low in your ear, too, I would not grudge them to the salmon : they are rather tasteless, infinitely troublesome and messy to eat, unless when M. Pernollet at Belley reduces them to a *coulis*, which he pours over dissolving wraiths of pastry.

It is not to be supposed that preoccupation

In Praise of France

with the table left us indifferent to the town of Bourg (pronounce it Bourck) or its people. We sat at the hotel door, and as we listened to that blurred and somewhat vinous speech, decided that we were imbibing the Burgundian atmosphere. They must be Burgundians in Bresse, although this whole region seems to have belonged to the Dukes of Savoy until Henri IV. annexed it to France ; its architecture, bulky, clumsy, and featureless, was quite un-French ; there was no elegance ; some of the older houses reminded me of a Van Gogh picture, all in bold lines and heavy strokes, holding together in defiance of equilibrium. Others of these buildings were staged outwards, so that the fourth storey projected slightly over the third, and so downwards : and their lower courses showed vast beams, almost two feet square.

Local woodwork was everywhere in evidence : I never saw a town with so many great oaken doors, or so many carpenters' shops ; and it kept me thinking of Romain Rolland's wonderful study of a master craftsman in the late Middle Ages. There was no lack of buffets and chests such as Colas Breugnon might have made, paunched and swelling with the lines of one of the great pumpkins that lay for sale in the market of a morning. And there was more elaborate work to see, of Colas Breugnon's time, or perhaps a little



Touring Club de France
OLD HOUSE AT BOURG-EN-BRESSE

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

later, for Bourg's church of Notre Dame was built in the early days of transition to the classic. It has no great beauty, except for the carved choir stalls, and even in them the panelling was nothing marvellous. But the stall seats gave you the artist's measure. Underneath each of them was carved a head—fools' heads with ears open like a funnel ; pursed-up heads with ears coifed ; some heads just simply looking at you, seen without exaggeration, simplified to the uttermost, yet infinitely subtle ; and some shown in profile with an Egyptian dignity in the folds of their headgear. I found it hard to believe that they were not all by the same hand : but there was a whole school of Bressan wood carvers at work early in the sixteenth century. These sedilia in Bourg's own church illustrate the Bressan talent when left to itself : but you can see that talent also dancing to strange tunes, called by the imported artists who built what is regarded as Bourg's chief glory, the Eglise de Brou.

A monograph on this church was sold me by the only bookseller in Bourg (there are four at least) who had heard of Colas Breugnon, and she—for the one competent bookseller was a woman—said that M. Victor Nodet was a very clever man. So he is. I cannot say what I should have felt had I been without M. Nodet's guidance ; but after reading him it was instantly plain that,

In Praise of France

whereas in a great church like that of Le Mans, even where the work of two periods divided by more than a century is joined up together, yet the whole grows like a tree ; all the lines spring and radiate in harmony, and the beauty of detail seems natural efflorescence. But here at Brou the eye is balked again and again, a line stops abruptly without purpose, a window seems to be wantonly shoved in, a section of wall imposes a blank screen. There is no natural growth in this architecture : Gothic was dead and cold when the young widow Margaret of Austria insisted on erecting this church as a memorial to her beautiful Philibert of Savoy ; but though all vital impulse had gone into the classic style, Gothic was still demanded, and a learned Flemish architect did his best to reproduce the mediæval fantasy. Ornament, indeed, gets free play ; free ! it runs riot. Nothing on heaven or earth could make me like it, but M. Nodet explains the reason of one's dislike. These artists were Flemings trying to be Italian at the period when Italian art had gone off into vulgar virtuosity ; and they handled marble with the same cult of detail as the Flemish painters of a tavern scene handled paint. Brillat-Savarin says that some illustrious chef claimed for confectionery the dignity of a branch of architecture ; well, architecture like this was a branch of confectionery. There is no denying that some of

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

the little statues round Philibert's tomb are very charming in a quaint Flemish way, while Philibert himself is really *beau* in marble ; and the two Margarets, she of Austria and she of Bourbon, Philibert's mother, lie in majestic state. But the whole thing is exotic : and when we came to look at the wood work, here was again a riot of detail carried out by local workmen under the direction of a Swiss whom the Fleming chose. The Bressan talent was there, but not quite itself. The elbow rests of the corner stall were two little boys talking to each other—enchanting urchins : but one did not find anywhere the simplicity of modelling, the gravity of beauty, or the breadth of caricature which were everywhere in the stalls of Notre Dame de Bourg. If Marguerite had kept Flemings and Swiss and Italians out of it altogether, and left it simply to the masons and wood carvers of Bresse, her church would have been less of a marvel, but more beautiful, I think, and certainly more homely : and probably she need not have so terribly embarrassed her exchequer.

Beyond Brou, we walked out along the road between an endless line of plane trees into the solemn country which surrounds Bourg. It has no gaiety, nothing coquettish in its beauty : the farmhouses are roughly thrown together ; yet there are wide spaces of rich cultivated land, and beyond these the long reposeful line of hills which

In Praise of France

even in their gentler undulations have something mountainous. The fields were full of heavy high-boned cattle, with all the look of a milking strain. Cattle and poultry are their wealth about here. On the market day at Bourg we saw many carts full of calves tied up in a net, and dozens of motor lorries, piled high with crates, and each crate choked with fowls—unhappy cockerels striving to crow and not able to stand up to do it. It is a country of comestibles. Rain came down heavy on that market day, and there were rows and rows of women standing each under her umbrella with her wares spread out : chickens, cheeses, or fruit, but nearly always butter—butter like the dews of morning, done up in fresh-grown lettuce leaves : who in such a country would not be interested in food ?

Yet Bourg and its 20,000 inhabitants seemed to all three of us oddly undefined in character : and one hot afternoon as we sat in the big market place opposite the hotel, we fell to asking ourselves what exactly gave one the sense that it was indubitably French. The motor-cars at the hotel door were not much liker their equivalents in England than were the respectable clerks and shop keepers who passed by ; and the women's dress bore just the normal European relation to what Paris is wearing or has worn. The houses, the public buildings, might have been found some-

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

where in Kent or Sussex—but not the white wooden sun-shutters on the windows. The *charmille*, or pleached alley, of pollarded plane trees was un-English too, and so, of course, was the Turco passing in his red képi and khaki tunic. But the Turco was an accident ; more essentially French was the big loose waggon, so lightly built and seemingly ramshackle, yet serviceable. (The harness, equally characteristic, seems heavier than ours.) But the true difference, even in that distributed light of evening, was the sense that over it all the sun had poured and lain stronger and more penetrating than ever with us : the white *volets* are a token of him ; and so is the most typical and un-English feature of all—the seats and tables on the pavement, and the life at the shop door.

A good illustration of that life was often to be found outside our hotel : three generations of our chef's family : M. Rébière himself with his large, capable, kindly, slow-moving wife, their two daughters, and the elder M. Rébière, who also had been a chef of renown in this day. The vocation is hereditary : and on the hotel walls hung a photograph of the fourth generation, whom we knew as an active tumbling youngster, but who figured there already in the white tunic and mitred *calotte* which he also is destined to wear.

In Praise of France

If I had a motor-car at command and were luxuriously disposed, I should probably stay with M. Rébière in Bourg and make excursions to other places. For although Bourg had its attractions, the best day we spent there was the day we went fishing. Bourg has a river of its own, but it runs west through the plain into the dull Saône, and contains only *des poissons pas intéressants*. We had to get to the Ain, I was told : a great splendid river, about as big as the Blackwater at Fermoy, and swift and swirling. From the bridge at Pont d'Ain a gentleman was fishing with bait and not having luck : I put up flies, and before I was ready, the lady who is not Humility had spotted fish under us—several of them, about a pound weight. One came up, examined my fly, and swam away. Farther down in the stream I saw the silvery side of a grayling as it turned—but not to take my fly : and while I still fished, a very young gentleman came along dangling from his rod what I soon recognised as three hooks tied back to back, a stroke haul, or snatcher. He also tried for the fish we had seen, but his brutal method was not more successful, and it was disturbing to the fish's equanimity as well as to my ideas of legitimate fishing.

So I went up to where a projecting sand-bank closed up the stream to a superb sweeping race, and over that I fished fly, minnow, and anything

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

I could think of, happily at leisure. Three is a perfect number for a fishing party when there is only one rod. Then I desisted, and we walked along the bank, which was a kind of levée or digue, lined, of course, with poplars, and the same lady (who is wasted away from a water-keeper's staff) spotted more fish cruising about. They also would none of my fly. A melancholy fisherman told me that they were *hotu*, a fish of no account : and none of the many anglers I met there reported well of the angling.

But once again the desire to fish had brought me to a lovely place, and the flora of the bank was as exciting as if it were Alpine. There was an exquisite little berberis : its leaf went as red as its berry (*épine de vinette* they call it) ; there were wild pinks which made one remember what colour pink really is ; golden rod along with loosestrife ; juniper, many shrubs and flowers unfamiliar and lovely, and the splendid river with half a mile of pool, smooth, yet swift-running and dimpled, and at the head of it a tearing race below a weir which made you cry out for a salmon rod. Across the river, the village in a low curve along the water's edge married itself, as the French word says, to the shape of the hillock, on whose top was a very beautifully proportioned château : while away to the north, beyond a mile or two of flat land, rose up the solemn line of hills, overspread that evening

In Praise of France

with a deep blue bloom. You could rub it off on yourself, one of my companions said, if you were there.

It became clear to us after that day that beauty lay to the east of Bourg, and we took our train hopefully past Ambérieu to Virieu-le-Grand, which is wonderfully situated in the very throat of a pass ; but our first concern there, to be candid, was *déjeuner*, and we had read much about M. Surgère. Conceive our feelings when we heard that M. Surgère had departed, and his hotel was kept by an Englishman. It was not so bad as that, however : the present owner has indeed followed his profession largely in England, and has married an Englishwoman : but he is a French chef and son of a chef ; and after the roomful of guests—mostly passing motorists—had finished eating, M. Ostertag made his appearance and bowed ceremonially, and the whole party at one table rose up and clapped.

We were less in a position to appreciate his talent, for, rejecting the alternative of a twenty-five franc menu, we had been content to graft on to our modest programme one locally famous dish—the *morilles à la crème*. I learnt later that the season for these little mushrooms is the spring, and this edition of them must have been dried, and therefore perhaps lacked savour. Yet the palates of that region are accessible to subtleties which

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

escape us, the less trained. *Cèpes*, which I ate elsewhere, seemed almost equally insipid ; yet they were certainly quite in season, for in the forest near Bourg we met a youth coming in with a basket of them. In England he would have been suspect of a wish to poison somebody—especially because he had among the large dingy *cèpes* one of the bright yellow flower-shaped fungi which the French call *girolle*, and value specially. I did not eat *girolle* to my knowledge, and could not without a tremor.

When we rose from M. Ostertag's table to explore Virieu-le-Grand, the first thing that met us was the statue of a gentleman plumed and wigged and most magnificent—Honoré d'Urfé, if you please, author of the *Astræa* : and he wrote a great part of that once illustrious romance up here in what is clearly not a village but an old mountain town—belonging to a civilisation quite distinct to that of Bourg. There never were houses that had more character, so peaked and gabled were these solid edifices of stone. The biggest of them told its story : it had belonged to the *percepteur* : and a strongly fortified building on each side of the road outside the *percepteur*'s door showed where traffic was held up for the levying of toll on this highway from France to Geneva. We climbed up the hill and observed how the line of houses followed the gorge of a little stream,

In Praise of France

turner of many wheels, and how exquisite was the adjustment of the gabled buildings to the sharp irregular windings of the street. The roofing here was done with small dark-coloured tiles, very closely set, not, as in Bresse, with large light red ones loosely thrown on. But the final distinction in Bugey was the usage of finishing-off gable walls with a succession of flat slabs set at intervals on the rising angle, and projecting at each side. The end wall always rose above the roof : and to prevent leakage between it and the tiles these slabs gave a shelter, their successive projections throwing off rain or snow. Nowadays concrete is used ; but people value the old way, and think of it now as a beauty.

From Virieu-le-Grand we approached the real object of our pilgrimage, Belley, where Brillat-Savarin was born in 1755 of an old provincial family, *noblesse de robe*. From Belley he went up to be a representative of the *tiers état* in the Constituent Assembly : he became mayor of Belley when the Legislative Assembly replaced the Constituent : from Belley he escaped to Switzerland when the Red Revolution went after him : to Belley he returned after a period in America, and in Belley he spent his holidays for the rest of a prolonged and undisturbed existence.

We were a little in trepidation. Some change of plans had involved more than one letter to the

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

Hôtel Pernollet, and in the correspondence I mentioned the special purpose of our journey. There came back a manifesto. We were invited to come when we liked, and were promised a *cuisine bien française*. "But," said M. Pernollet, "do not come in the expectation of a conversation with me : *Je ne vous l'accorderai pas.*"—He went on to explain in fierce terse sentences that he "had broken the bridges" between himself and "all journalists, writers, and gastronomical authors." "I will do what I can to gratify your palate : I will not gratify your curiosity. Pardon my brutality of speech, but I prefer that to polite ambiguities (*à des politesses indécises*)."
I had answered, doing my best to rival M. Pernollet's serried laconisms, and not even allowing that I understood his state of mind (for the poor man had been through a centenary last year commemorating the publication of the *Physiologie du Goût*). And so, we trembled. There was plainly an artist here, but plainly an irascible artist. Our apprehensions ceased when we reached the bureau, and gave our names. The perfectly charming young lady could not be said to display anything, but there was no mistaking the veiled amusement which lay behind her welcome. The exchange of cartels was not unknown to her.

Let me say at once that M. Pernollet held to his word. We had no access to him : socially, we

In Praise of France

never saw him. He could indeed be perceived directing operations. "At my oven by six o'clock in the morning, you will find me there till nine at night," he had written, and it was a true word, as we could see: for in the best hotels of that country the kitchen is only divided by a screen of glass from the reception hall, so that the guests can see and oversee all stages of the preparation—and can be edified by its exquisite cleanliness. But if we did not meet the artist we met his lady, Madame Pernollet made herself known to us that evening at dinner, and she had the Frenchwoman's talent for giving a combined impression of competence and charm. She, too, conveyed the sense of discreetly subdued amusement (how she and her helper at the desk must have laughed over the correspondence !), but there was also the suggestion that she somehow inarticulately proffered balms which she was not unaccustomed to apply wherever M. Pernollet had passed. And, now I come to think of it, when we first ate a dinner of M. Pernollet's confection, perhaps he also was propitiatory: it was almost unduly lenitive: too suave a succession of creamy and caressing succulences. Some gastronomical author ought to write a poem of "The Chef's Wooing." Where would the language of flowers be in comparison to what M. Pernollet could say without a word?

But consider seriously M. Pernollet and hi

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

hotel as facts in the social history of provincial France. Here is by general admission one of the best artists in a kind of art which does not lack its rich reward (a Hungarian friend, acquainted with all the European languages, capitals, and cuisines, wrote to me at Belley asking if I knew that the chef in our hotel was the best in Western Europe) : and he executes his masterpieces in a town of some 6,000 or 7,000 people, away on a branch line, apart from the main stream of motor traffic, which passes through Bourg and Virieu-le-Grand. Aix les Bains is the only neighbouring centre of rich people, and motorists constantly come over from there for a meal in the *grande salle*.

For there are two dining-rooms : in one is served the ordinary, which in 1924 cost ten francs : in the other, the special menu at twenty-five. Both rooms are plain and simple, but the special salle is ornamented with pictures ; the other, with its long straight boards running down the middle, and smaller tables at each side, was perfectly unadorned, and to our mind the pleasanter of the two : partly because of its lowness, which made the proportions very charming. Neither was cleaner than the other, for each was as clean as a room could be. All the service was done by maids, and the same girls who arrived with the coffee in the morning and ran about the passages during the day were those who brought you the most

In Praise of France

exquisite plats and the choicest wines if you dined in luxury. Some of them at least were evidently new to the business : what one used to call in Donegal “ wild cutties,” just brought in from some mountain farm. They must have done an immense day’s work, but they throve on it, and were as gay as a colony of sparrows. It is a hard thing to give an hotel an atmosphere that is fresh and merry and welcoming, and M. Pernolle can thank the ladies of his establishment for what is presumably their achievement.

His own talents are at the service of his fellow-citizens, and probably the backbone of his business is the provision of ordinary meals for the local farmers, officials, and business men—and not for them only : I saw more than one working-man eating there with his cap on. The midday meal was the important one : it had a course more, I think, in both rooms. We tried the costlier service twice—for a *déjeuner* and a *diner* (and we wisely separated these meals by more than a day’s interval). But whether we ate in one place or the other, we always ate with attention. It would have been stupid not to.

What we felt was that we ate under direction : everybody accepted the programme which M. Pernolle from his kitchen conducted. Salt was on the tables, but one very rarely used it. In the ordinary room there was one pepper pot among

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

sixty or seventy persons : I say this because after some scrutiny we detected its presence. It would have been a bolder guest than any of us who should have ventured to ask for mustard. That tradition admitted no crudities of contrast. We saw no *hors d'œuvre* : I wonder what happens when travelling Americans clamour for a profusion of them, as assuredly some must have done. Does the artist provide them with something exquisite at a penal cost ? Or does he—as I think more likely—tell them in classic French to go elsewhere if they are not content with what is provided ? Probably he holds that *hors d'œuvre* are an invasion of Slavonic barbarism—especially indefensible when every meal begins with a slice of exquisite melon. There was always profusion of fruit—produce of the country, grapes, pears, and peaches. Cheese always, of course, but only of one kind, and that never strongly flavoured.

All this is true of the ordinary menu, and the note of the ordinary was simplicity ; but whatever it contained was cooked with the uttermost degree of perfection. It is a difficult place to get fish in, and the trout of these waters are not to be compared with the pink-fleshed fish of many Scotch and Irish waters : but they came up aromatic, exquisite, yet tasting absolutely of themselves. Everything there seemed to get its own ultimate quintessential expression, fish, flesh, or fowl.

In Praise of France

Better than the trout was *lavaret* from the Lac du Bourget : we know them as pollen, which Lough Neagh alone of British waters sends to London : but till I went to Belley I had no conception how delicious this fresh-water herring could be. Yet in all the subtle simplicities one thing pleased me most. The salad was made always with red wine instead of vinegar.

Perhaps I must defend myself for all this talk about eating. Good taste in a British view demands that you shall cultivate all your senses fastidiously—except that of taste. You may be eloquent about what you see, hear, or smell—fragrances, music, or bird song, landscape or picture ; you may condemn the ugly in those kinds with what emphasis you command ; but if you permit yourself to savour food, at least you should savour it in silence. Well, I kick against these canons. What I see in M. Pernolle is a very able man carrying on with pride an hereditary craft or art, in which any serious observer must recognise the characteristic genius of his country. You may be glad to get away from it to beef-steaks and mustard, or salmon and vinegar ; but here is a thought-out arrangement of substances and savours, as severe and as subtle and as harmonious and as French as the work of Ingres or of Racine.

Also, the whole is based on a strict economy :

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

one is given enough and just enough of everything. Without economy the thing could not be done at all. Twenty-five francs is a good deal to pay for a dinner, but a single *plat* out of these menus would cost at least as much in any restaurant in Paris which kept a chef of at all the same excellence : and for the citizens of Belley it seems to me a great matter to have the best of fare provided in the ordinary at a price which is high indeed for simple people, yet usual everywhere in France of to-day. There is this also to be said. The people of Bugey are, as one of them said to me, both *très gourmands* and *très gourmets*, and I looked about for the effects. I saw nobody gross or corpulent : I did see a remarkable number of men, both young and middle-aged, extraordinarily long and light in the leg, who most certainly could run up a mountain or down one with very little trouble to themselves : and among the women in all these little towns and villages the average of looks was very high, and it was a clean-cut type of prettiness, vivacious, alert, and active. In short, if they eat well, they do not over-eat themselves.

As for the place itself—well, sometimes a town or countryside seems laying itself out to make a good impression. Belley did that to us. We came on what Ireland calls a “pet day” between two rainy ones : every thing was washed and shining,

In Praise of France

no dusty haze over the clean wholesome sunlight. The town was full of beautiful houses, some of which, no doubt, were old already when the great man of Belley began to take intelligent interest in his victuals. And where there was newness it harmonised. There was space : tree-lined boulevards and a central *place*, a converging point of streets irregularly radiating with a pleasant fountain : and up beyond the hotel a high level plateau, planted with trees of great age, not pollarded, but close enough set for their branches to interlock and give complete shade. They call it the *promenoir* : and at the end beyond the trees is an open terrace from which the ground falls steeply, and you look out north and east to the engirdling mountains. For Belley, standing more than 1,000 feet over sea-level, covers the top of a hill surrounded by steep valleys ; and beyond these valleys real mountains shut it in, yet not so closely but that the eye has full range. Away north was the Grand Colombier, beyond Virieu-le-Grand from which we had come : east of that one could see a long recession of rising peaks and ridges, clear yet vaporous : but beyond them all, up against the blue, there jutted one tiny triangle of pure solid white. We did not need to be told it was Mont Blanc. It could have been blotted out from the picture without lessening the beauty of all that enchanting line and colour, yet

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

it added keenly to the mind's delight ; it placed us in Europe : it helped us to *orienter* ourselves : and until I have got my bearings I never feel happily at home. That was part of the effort which Belley made to receive us graciously : and, as if to make us feel we had been privileged, we never saw Mont Blanc again.

Yet I think that first evening was even more beautiful when, straying out after dinner, we sat again on the terrace and saw the mountains bathed in plum colour, grape colour, and all the tints that run from deepest purple to palest blue : till suddenly behind the mountain, to the east, there was a sharp glint, and the moon, quivering like quicksilver, began to be pushed up into the sky. It was too dramatic : and as she mounted, obliterating all the twilight colour by her brilliance, we were forced to think of some elderly dramatic star insisting upon a concentration of limelight in her determination to dazzle. And when an overgrown planet followed in attendance at the exact distance which a theatrical artist would have designed, we simply turned our backs upon the meretricious display and went back among the splashed and dappled plane-tree columns, fantastically overarched, to our hotel.

Next day was a downpour, but we sallied out to reconnoitre, and were soon arrested by the sight of an ox standing motionless, as only oxen

In Praise of France

can be, in the rain. But he was neatly covered with a rubber sheet, a superb animal perfectly cared for : the yoke was on him, and he stood with neck slightly bent inwards, as if his fellow were still in position. And then we saw that he stood at the door of a forge, and that his fellow was being shod. They shoe only the outer side of the cloven hoof, and manifestly the ox's feet are tenderer than a horse's, and the patient, if he resents pain, has horns. This patient therefore stood within a strong wooden frame, and each leg was fast roped, even the one which the smith had on his knee. The precaution was not unnecessary, for at a stage in the proceeding the great beast began to plunge wildly, and could have made havoc in an establishment much less brittle than a china-shop. They tightened the roping, and his owner, a middle-aged farmer, who stood at watch there, said to me that the stouter the worker (*plus il a de courage*) the more sensitive he is to pain. I had perfect confidence that this man's cattle would not be cruelly handled while he stood by : every word of his talk showed that they were the pride of his life. An ox, he said, is better to work with than a horse when hills are steep and the ground heavy : he never refuses (*il ne renonce jamais*). When I said I was Irish, his face showed interest. It was a *grand pays de bétail*, he said. Then the shoeing was over, the ropes untied, and we were warned

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

to stand clear : but there was no need : all that plunging and dragging five minutes before had left no tumult in those placid nerves, and the great beast walked out quietly and took his place beside the other—a noble pair.

Rain or no rain, we marched out that afternoon along the spine of the town's ridge, past the barrack and more Turcos, and down a steep descent between high hedges of acacia, till we reached a little river at the bottom, and turned along its valley to where the roofs of a village tempted us. Down here the hedges were of box, with much of the *épine-de-vinette* making them beautiful. There was untidy tillage, and the hamlet when we reached it was untidier still. But what houses ! Almost every roof had some exquisite little tilt in its line : the deep eaves projected over strong beautiful supporting beams of oak timber ; the mediæval instinct which could not make a thing without imparting beauty somehow seemed to have here full play. But the dirt, the smells, the swarming in and out of animal and human inhabitants were mediæval too, and when we were through the place we were glad to bruise walnut leaves and press their clean sharp fragrance to our noses. I never saw anything else quite so backward in France ; and it struck me afterwards that this was the only commune in which we found no war memorial. It would not be easy to get the people

In Praise of France

of that village to take an interest in anything more abstract than the price of a heifer.

The valley was deep in marsh, and people were busy cutting the reeds which presumably they use for bedding cattle, as there is no thatching done. The road was solitary, and we were in some doubt as to getting across and back to Belley, when we perceived a line of poplars marching across the level at right angles to the stream ; and we inferred, correctly, that there must be a causeway or a road. That is a useful land sign to remember in France. The road took us back by a different street, and we noted a convent, now secularised but not utilised as yet : and opposite it the *Café Temporel* proclaimed, I suppose, some anti-clerical sympathies. What used to be the Bishop's palace, a very fine house dating from the *grand siècle*, is now a regimental dépôt.

Belley, like Bourg, was originally governed by an ecclesiastical potentate, under the suzerainty of Savoy. All this country adopted the principles of the Revolution with great fervour, and in 1792 the "Allobrogian nation," assembling at Chambéry, its ancient capital, expressed its desire to become a department of France. I am not sure whether Bugey and Bresse were represented at that gathering. What I do know is that Brillat-Savarin, then mayor of Belley, was considered to show a culpable leniency towards persons of

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

unsound patriotism, and a representative of the Convention came down in 1794, before whom the Mayor of Belley fled to Switzerland.

We had still to renew the adventure of fishing, and next day being perfectly adorable (for everything but fishing), took us by train to Pugieu in the valley of the Furans. In retrospect that expedition resolves itself into a pageant of puppies. They began as we walked along the short, straight road from station to village. I give that pointer credit for being a puppy, but he was full-sized, and his proud owner attracted our notice by confiding to him his cap. The pointer, accepting the trust, hustled with it into the hedge, and as we passed, the owner was saying to his young lady, “ You shall see how I have him trained.” He whistled and he cried “ *Apporte*,” yet nothing happened, and as we passed them both he and the lady began to peer into the hedge. A gap some fifty yards ahead gave us the advantage, and disclosed the dog couched and jubilant far out in the fields. We signalled back intelligence ; they joined us, and again the owner cried *Apporte*. More jubilant than ever the dog leapt to his feet, tossed the cap in the air, and rioted off with it : then entering the road a long distance ahead came cantering back and with conscious merit deposited his trophy—at the feet of Humility. That sealed the bond, and we went to the village as old friends,

In Praise of France

Humility expatiating on the intelligence which was discernible on the dog's countenance—she could with decency have said no less. They parted from us, and before we had gone another fifty yards two more half-grown hounds were soliciting and receiving attention.

We had to lunch somewhere, but where we knew not, and as we pushed on through that quaint village the valley grew lovelier every minute with its high crags glittering in the sunlight on the road to Roussillon. Vine-clad slopes ran half-way up, then came shrub, and at the top, as on all these hillsides, was a band of stratified rock some fifty feet perpendicular, yet broken into crevices and crannies where vegetation nestled. Simply as a considered ornamental frieze to these rock walls, nothing could have been better. We came back then, and asked for *déjeuner* in a little café where was nobody except the household eating at the back of the long narrow room ; but there were tables of walnut wood, and we were promised an omelette. While the *patronne* went off to make it, the *patron* set before us a bottle of red wine and a cloth of the coarsest linen, but spotless. There is no use expecting omelettes in such places at home, but the clean cloth is possible—and very rare.

I gathered miscellaneous information ; for instance, that the chief use of all the acacias was

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

to furnish vine stakes—the wood being very durable. Presently in came three anglers. They joined the household party, and there appeared on their table a really considerable trout. When the patron came to bring us cheese, I inquired after it; but he, not they, had caught it. With a bait? No, with a *nasse*. A *nasse* is a fish trap, and as we ate our cheese I overheard fragments of a conversation about the relative advantages of fishing with hook or net. I was disposed to agree with their conclusion that the hook had a poor chance. Still there were trout. We had an excellent and simple meal, ending up with a glass of *marc*, oddly reminiscent of poteen. Has it also fusel oil in large proportions? Meanwhile, of course, a dog had found my company, and was being pampered till another, this time an Alsatian, entered with a new arrival, and the domestic dog prudently retreated under a table and made demonstrations until the Alsatian was put abroad on the street.

We followed, and I proposed to fish (the trout we had seen weighed a pound and a half, and I might catch its comrade), but my company wanted to explore one little back street or wynd. And certainly those houses with the crow-stepped stones of their gables jutting out and with their great eaves and the wedding of fine woodwork to fine masonry, would tempt anyone. The wynd

In Praise of France

curved back, and somehow we were at the butt end of a large barn-like building, where was a lean-to containing a great piece of massive wood-work that puzzled me till I recognised the screw and knew it was a press. I was explaining this when my company caught sight of some straw on which reclined a mother dog—half hound, half pointer—and her puppy. It was beyond doubt an engaging puppy, about the size of a dachshund, though longer in the leg, and I have not a word but good to say of it, for we owe to it the pleasantest introduction. As the softness of its coat was being praised and petted, we were aware of a presence, and a handsome dark-haired young lady stood there, as we supposed, wanting to know what we were doing in her backyard.

On the contrary, she had come to ask if we were strangers trying to get into the church (we had not known the barn-like building was the church) ; and would we perhaps like to look at her house, which was the old presbytery ? Such a greeting to intruders is not common anywhere, and is specially rare in France, so (but a little abashed by our intrusion), we climbed after her up the stone steps that led into the old *cure*. Its raftered roof was black with smoke ; the old buffet, obviously of local work, was beautiful ; and the chairs (there were just enough for herself and us) were old too. Everything was old, everything was characteristic ;

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

but one piece of furniture puzzled me. It was the *pétroir*, or kneading trough—no longer in use, for the village now has a *four banal* or communal bakery, and everybody brings in their meal weekly to have it baked into a great round loaf, like a small millstone. She showed us this bread, and then would not be content till she had fetched a bottle of their own wine, which had come from the press that we were looking at. I could hardly credit that this beautiful clear vintage had issued from that rough dusty apparatus. The wine was Manicle, one of the two for which this countryside is noted : clean and slightly sharp, with the least suggestion of a sparkle in it.

We elicited from the lady that she was a *fonctionnaire*, or civil servant, on her holidays, and, on further inquiry, that she was a schoolmistress teaching in the Lycée, of all places in the world, at Monaco. Strange transition from that piece of cosmopolis to this village in the hills ! At last the liver-coloured puppy, tired of endearments, leapt from the lap where it was being petted, and curled itself under the stove, which now fills up what used to be the great wide hearth, from which came all the smoke to blacken the rafters ; and we took it as a sign to bid our hostess adieu. She has well wishers who may never see her again, but will not forget her gracious action.

We took to the river then, downstream, on our

In Praise of France

way towards Belley—a lovely little river with plenty of places where unseen you could dodge a fly into likely corners under overhanging bank or bushes. But if it had trout, I saw none. Fish snare and net are too hard for rod and line : and so when difficulties of ground drove us back to the road, we stayed on it and walked ahead past the station of Chazay-Bons and its attractive village and along another bit of motor-infested highway till a foot traveller stopped and asked us the distance to Bons, which we told him. He then consulted us on his chances of getting work there that night. His phrase, "*je me suis débauché ce matin,*" was a pretty piece of antique French which would have puzzled me had not the other followed it : "*je cherche à m'embaucher ce soir.*" *Embaucher* is everybody's word for taking on a workman, but I had never known the original meaning of *débaucher*. We told him there was a concrete factory in Bons, and that the vineyards were short of hands, and so went on our way feeling ourselves accepted as denizens of Bugey.

But the way was long, broad, and dusty ; we caught sight of a winding road across the valley and of poplars leading towards it, and again the indication was good. Soon we were on a byroad, eating blackberries in a hot sun, and a little farther on settled to a roadside repose. I had ceased to admire the view and in a pleasant doze was con-

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

scious of chirruping encouragements addressed to something, when suddenly the something leapt with hard scrabbling feet upon my face. It was another lovely puppy, and its enthusiasm knew nothing but bounds, the first of which lit on me. We went on then after the puppy had been sufficiently praised for its achievement, and soon were in another village which turned out to be the first half of Chazay-Bons. Here was a house of more importance—but sober, but discreet, but fastidious in all the finished beauty of its proportions : the same beauty that the cottages had, but refined and tightened up a little in its application to a larger building. Beyond this manor was a farmyard overlooked by a two-storey building where under the immeasurable eaves was a gallery or balcony of oak : nowhere have I ever seen woodwork and stonework so happily combined. Closing the farmyard was a fine iron gate, and within were fowls innumerable—and another hound puppy. He approached the gateway, addressed us affectionately, and finally, squeezing his soft body through the bars, deposited as much farmyard as he could upon us. But there was no denying his charm.

We got back now into another big road, but it wound agreeably up through trees, and took us past the Promenoir to M. Pernolle's dominion. The young lady of the bureau inquired with that

In Praise of France

touch of malice to which fishermen must accustom themselves how my fishing had prospered. I assured her with perfect truth that I had caught as much as I expected, and that I owed to my rod an enchanting afternoon.

Next day we got back to our pilgrimage of affectionate gastronomy. At Vieu, high up in the hills, there exists the *gentilhommière* of Brillat-Savarin, where he had shooting-parties and dinner-parties, and prepared his masterpieces of the kitchen ; and also, presumably, the stories which it was his habit to read aloud to the company. We have not these *contes drôlatiques* : by his last instructions they were burnt. I wonder if they were very shocking : the *Physiologie du Goût* has wit of many kinds, but none of the *esprit gaulois*.

To reach Vieu, we had to pass through Artemare : it is the next station after Virieu-le-Grand, and, lying off the main road, is scarcely to be called a town. Yet it also has been illustrious in gastronomy : one of the chefs whose name is most widely reputed in Bugey was la Mère Prusse, who kept an inn at Artemare. It was almost a duty, since we had to have *déjeuner* somewhere, to visit the hotel of her kinsman and successor. But we sought no farther than the Hôtel de Commerce, and ordered a Ford car to be ready for us at the end of three-quarters of an hour. Then we walked into the dining-room of that little out-of-the-way

In Brillat-Savarin's Country

hotel, and a menu of seven courses confronted us. Well, what could gastronomists on a pilgrimage to the home of Brillat-Savarin do but accept such a meal when it was offered ? Excellent wine included, it cost five shillings a head English money ; and it was very good indeed. When more than an hour and only half of our meal had been consumed, the question of our pilgrimage was raised. We decided that it would be a poor tribute to Brillat-Savarin's memory that we should scamp our repast : yet in the end we gave up our ice. It is to be remarked that most of the guests appeared to be local people—probably the staff of a big saw-mill : and probably they eat such a meal every day. They looked as if they did—and threw on it.

Our Ford car set us down outside the church which crowns the hill : ever so old, ever so simple, its sharply angular planes of roof beautiful against the blue of a rain-washed sky. This also had been Roman : Vieu is *Vicus*. Fifty yards off was Brillat-Savarin's turreted little shooting-lodge. I cannot pretend that the convenience for devotions was a probable attraction for our hero. His death was due to a religious observance, but circumstances qualify the fact. He received, in 1826, an invitation from the President of the Cour de Cassation, in which he held a post, to attend with his colleagues the expiatory service of 21st January—

In Praise of France

anniversary of Louis XVI.'s execution. "Your attendance will be the more welcome," wrote the President, "as it will be for the first time." Brillat-Savarin was in bed with a cold, careful of his health as was his custom : but this letter suggested danger to the post to which he clung like a limpet ; and he risked pneumonia, got it, and died.

When we went out into the field before the old gourmet's house, and looked over the lovely plateau of Valromey to high jagged Jura peaks in the distance, we knew the attraction which had fixed him there. This gastronomist was a keen sportsman, a lover of nature, and a lover of the varied beauty in which his native land was so rich. You can judge him by the place he chose.

Next day had to be the last. We atoned for some neglect by a visit to the diocesan college where Lamartine made his studies and began to develop his talent for a poetry which I have never enjoyed. A nice old nun showed us round the *charmille* where the youth is reputed to have meditated : and these gloomy drooping trees and the touch of dilapidation about it all was in full harmony with his religious adaptation of the Byronic gloom. It was jolly, as a relief, to see beyond the big bathing-pond a most competent and thriving vegetable garden on the downward slope ; and higher up the hill their own *clos* for their own wine, and a field leading up to it, where

Tourisme dans la France

THE CHÂTEAU OF GISORS



In Brillat-Savarin's Country

boys can play in the sun. Opposite the college is a hospital run by a religious order, and a fine stalwart nun kindly took us up into the pharmacy, which keeps the furniture of 1760 with adorable faïence jars for drugs all round it—holding nothing nowadays. They get many offers to buy, but they stick to these treasures, as well as to a set of cane-seated chairs of that period, a beautiful buffet, and other fine things, and rightly. Their visiting specialist, who comes all the way from Lyons, often brings people to see their pharmacy, and it increases their glory and their self-content.

We ate our last meal in Belley on the lavish scale—but I must say no more except that it ended with a *pintardon*, or guinea-chicken, and that after it we said that we would eat no more that day ; yet when dinner came it found us, as the French say, *frais et dispos*. M. Pernolle does not produce repletion. That dinner was at Culoz, whither an *autobus* had taken us, passing through little hamlets and picking up their letters, and making it very clear that we had only tapped the charm of that countryside. From the hill above Culoz we had a glimpse of the Lac de Bourget, which inspired what passes for Lamartine's masterpiece. Frankly, I would not give Brillat-Savarin's book for a wilderness of Lamartines.

Looking back on it all now, I have only one regret—that we experimented so often with

In Praise of France

Rhone wines. Côte Rôtie and the rest are good to drink when you cannot get Bordeaux or Burgundy ; but Burgundy is at home there, and the Corton and Vosnes-Romanée which we did try at M. Pernollet's house, though not very old, shook for the first time my conviction that there is nothing so good as the best Bordeaux. Yet for a light wine to drink in hot weather, the local Virieu or Manicle, or, perhaps best of all, Maretel, are impossible to beat. They have sharpness without acidity, and a bouquet like some wild fruit—as if it were a blonde strawberry.

VI

GISORS

A BOUT two-thirds of the way from Dieppe to Paris a pleasant little river, seen from the railway carriage, inevitably suggests trout. It passes through Gisors, a place of attractive and even romantic name. Looking Gisors up in Percy Dearmer's *Highways and Byways in Normandy*, I discovered that an hotel there was called "Les Trois Poissons." Adding to these considerations that the franc was at ninety odd, I decided on Gisors for the Easter week-end.

It is not good to make preparations too elaborately for such an outing, so I took my return ticket to Dieppe and chanced the rest ; but anyone whom it concerns may be told that a train goes out at six which gives you two hours in Dieppe—perfect time to get tea in a *pâtisserie* and revive one's impressions of that delightful port. There are old timbered houses beyond St. Jacques that had escaped me before ; and one never gets to the end of the wrought iron balconies in the High Street.

The train from Dieppe gets one to Gisors about eight, not at all too late for dinner. Five minutes'

In Praise of France

walk brings you to the main street, which virtually is Gisors town—and in another two or three minutes I saw the emblematic fishes of “Les Trois Poissons.” Of course the hotel was old—with such a name it was bound to be. Less inevitably, it was clean as Ripolin and varnish could make it. In the dark after dinner one distinguished no more than the singularly jagged profile of roofs on each side a rising street : but I discovered a fishing-tackle shop still open and was posted on my chances. There was no free water on the Epte : leave might be got by asking : but the landlord of my hotel had a *bonne pêche*, and so to him I went. The *patron*, who was also the excellent chef, was an angler, but at once handed me over to a young Frenchman staying there to fish, who would show me the water next day. And so, thanks to the possession of a rod and line, I was within two hours provided with introductions and no longer quite a stranger in Gisors.

Probably the French male develops earlier, but this lad of eighteen was in manner and education the equivalent of an Englishman of three-and-twenty ; and not many even at that age would be so easily and pleasantly companionable to an elderly foreigner. Of course I had the prestige of coming from a country where the most reputed rods originate. No fly-fisher in France will be seen without one nowadays : they wave them in

your face and cry “ Hardy ! ” exuberantly. Dry fly-fishing is still a new idea in France, being pursued with the zeal that one saw over lawn tennis thirty or forty years ago. This young man was badly bitten with the passion and we talked fishing shop all the four miles to our river next day ; but at one point, where the road passed through forest, he broke off to tell me that earlier in the week he had found a boar hunt in progress here. Sportsmen with guns were posted all along the road while dogs worked through the coverts opposite : what happened in the end was that one gentleman, not fancying his post, shifted from it, leaving a gap ; and precisely through that gap the boar bolted—unshot at. Somehow I never believed before in the existence of wild boars in such places : Gisors is not fifty miles from Paris. But here, as everywhere in Normandy, forests make great accommodation for all manner of game.

The river, when we got to it, was not the Epte, but the Ferrières, a jolly little stream, ten or twelve yards wide with a good flow of gently swirling water : and there were trout rising, and we failed to catch them while they did rise. I did no credit to the English-speaking race of anglers—and never shall, with the dry fly. Next day my young man got one of a pound which made him happy : but a bearded expert came down, caught over a dozen, put back as many more, and went back to Paris.

In Praise of France

The fish are there and I have no doubt that the tales of three, or even five, pounders are true. But from my point of view it was not a fishing to return to, since I had no gum boots and the bank was excessively wet. Had I been better provided, or had my luck been better in the two hours I fished, I should know less about Gisors.

Going out, one had seen, of course, how picturesque the town is, with the little river running through its centre under the huge enclosure of the old castle and past the great church : and how charming was the rise of the street from the river as it flanked the hill which the castle crowns. But it is a place of nooks and corners ; and because my fishing had not sped, I spent the sunny Easter Eve in exploration.

It was a piece of luck to hit at once on the most delightful access to the château. From the bridge, which is the focal centre of Gisors, I turned along the river, up-stream, where the water, walled-in and rapid, passes the washing-place, with its old slated roof propped on old and admirably fashioned timbers : then a footbridge crosses it and brings you out to the circle of ramparts which Philip Augustus, in days of artillery, threw around the thirteenth-century ring of masonry. From here a path leads up to a postern gate and you are at once in an enclosure of some three acres, covered with well-kept grass, laid out with walks and seats,

judiciously tree-planted, and all shut in by this great wall with its dozen of towers ; while in the centre of the whole rises the original eleventh-century fortress, perched in the early Norman fashion on top of a mote or steep mound, such as we all know : but this mote must be close on a hundred feet high and of vast circumference.

The mediæval strongholds had their mediæval uses no doubt, and even to-day have their interest ; but I have never elsewhere seen a mediæval stronghold so ingeniously turned into a modern pleasure ground. As an ancient monument the place was richly worth keeping, but it has been so kept that, first, it tells its story historically in the plainest way ; yet, if you do not care about the story there are seats and greenness, and the song of birds, and great beautiful masses of masonry making a background for trees, and themselves seen against an outer ring of greenness. And from the terrace, where originally stood the dwelling place, the château royal, you look down on Gisors, and see a riot of fantasy in the peaked and gabled lines of its roofs : and a riot of colour in the rose and purple, the browns and umbers of its infinitely varied tiling. The local guide to Gisors makes a surprising statement : the town, it says, has only one really old house of interest. I should have said it had dozens.

France has something about it which gives a

In Praise of France

quicker, sharper change from town life than anything I know in England : it has the simplicity of manners proper to a country which lives in the main by working the land. Gisors, if it were in England, would contain a large element of people who used it as a dormitory and spent their working life in the capital. I saw no trace of any such class there—indeed I have not met it anywhere in France. Gisors is a town, it has a town life of its own, and though its walls are nowhere traceable, yet it has its sharply defined town frontiers : but how definitely its life is the life of a country town ! My young Parisian was almost incredulous that anything could be *si province* so near Paris. Everybody was in bed by half-past ten, he said, contemptuously. Yet it had its full equipment as a town—even its theatre, once the chapel of a Carmelite convent, whose beautiful buildings, in the best style of the *grand siècle*, are used by the municipality for varying purposes. But the theatre of Gisors does not look as if it often opened its doors ; the only other distraction is the cinema, and it seems that at Gisors the cinema is left to workmen ; good society does not go to the pictures. Nor, it appears, does good society share one of my oldest passions. The bills of a menagerie had attracted me, even before I met a pony-trap with fife and drum on board, proclaiming its glories in the market-place. These performers had a lament-

ably small audience for their entertainment on Easter Eve, in spite of the advertised reputation of the "terrible lioness, Bellona," "*auteur de plusieurs accidents.*" This delicate way of putting the lady's record on evidence was no doubt prudent, for the same handbill expressed the management's enthusiastic willingness "to enter into negotiations for special performances in boarding schools." Indeed their show could be held in any good-sized school-room which had a door wide enough to admit the single cage with its seven compartments —one, in the middle, being a little larger than the rest. A couple of wolves were on the left, a tiny Malayan bear next to them, running ceaselessly back and forward with the odd shamble of all bears, from Polars downward. The rest was tight-packed with lions, half a dozen of them. We saw the terrible Bellona curveting about to a waltz tune in the central compartment, along with her tamer, and there was no accident, nor, indeed, any emotion. The evening's sole success was furnished by the little bear which, after scrambling about the bars and taking sugar in all postures from between his trainer's lips—not a difficult trick to teach a bear—was at last given a bottle, presumably with treacle in it. Anyhow he stood up on his hind feet and swigged and swigged, tilting himself and the flagon as far back as balance permitted, and rushing back for another suck at it

In Praise of France

every time that it was taken away. A Norman audience appreciated this devotion to the bottle and beyond all manner of doubt the little bear enjoyed his turn. After it was over, he ceased to run about like a soul in pain. It was not just so pleasant to see the leading man give an exhibition of training two lion cubs—half-grown creatures as big as mastiffs. One was so friendly that it was difficult to make it snarl, and nobody showed the least surprise when it let the tamer stand on his prostrate body. But the other cub was manifestly on the way to be turned into a dangerous beast by these repeated urgings to show teeth and claws.

In short, it was not a grand display ; and yet one would have thought that on the evening of a fête Gisors should produce more than thirty or forty spectators. Are the shadows of the picture house getting the better of the solid, even in the world of wild beasts ? Or is it just the indifference of the farmer class ? Most of the men one saw in the streets were farmers, either on holiday or marketing—curiously unlike the types we know. Every one of them had the stiff gait of the field labourer. They had neither the English farmer's appearance of a smartly turned out steward, nor the Irish farmer's look of a cattle dealer. Farming in France remains a very primitive way of life : in my explorations I came up past one great home-stead where half a dozen fine horses were coming

in from work and there were a couple of carts on their way back from the town. But all had a roughness in their turn-out that no holder of so big a place in England would tolerate, any more than he would stand the deeply rutted cart-track as his sole access. Penurious folk—but rooted in their particular holdings with a tremendous grip. It is extraordinary, too, how all this agricultural population passes through its long military training, yet keeps no sign of the barrack-yard. They can never have spent the time on sloping arms by numbers, polishing buttons and, in general, on “soldiering,” which British military discipline would have exacted.

My small wanderings taught me that the train going through this part of Normandy gives a delusive impression of a country that is all in grass. Down in the river valley, where the rail runs, there is indeed nothing but pasture, or orchard over pasture : but once you rise to the top of these great rolling slopes, wide tillage spreads everywhere. There is great variety of development. I saw a motor tractor at work, but I saw also the pleasant old-fashioned sight of a sower’s broad swinging gesture on a dry sunny day, while a boy was harrowing the field with two mules. That was beside Beaujeu—a little village that I reached by taking the first possible turning off the main road to Pontoise and Paris : and there, not half a

In Praise of France

mile from the racing motors, I suddenly came on an enchanting little chapel of the sixteenth century with its end projecting into the tiny village green : but the west front was inaccessible, for the huge gate of the château of Beaujeu joined the southern wall and these timbered portals shut off what was, no doubt, the seigneur's access to his private chapel. It was an impressive demonstration of seclusion, yet a few yards farther along, the road overlooked the great *bassecour*, with its circular *pigeonnière*, whose cone of roofing had fallen in : a doorway showed sunny glimpses of the *cour d'honneur*, and by climbing the hill one could see the long sagging line of the château's tiled roof. The chapel door was locked, though Mass is said there every Sunday ; the owners keep themselves and their belongings in a discreet retirement, probably with straitened means. But they have a dwelling which with its whole surroundings gave me one of the most agreeable impressions of the old seigneurial life that I have ever received. There was dignity and simplicity in its rich beauty, heightened, perhaps, by a touch of pathos in the suggestion of effort to maintain continuity with the past. Under the Third Republic there exists assuredly a most surprising mixture of the old and the new ; and there is nothing that Europe should be more grateful for, nor can more surely count on, than the deep-seated conservatism of France

VII

IN THE MIDI

A HEATED third class in the night express from Paris, and three Belgians sharing it with me—father, daughter, and a middle-aged gentleman friend. All looked as if they belonged to a Flemish picture, and the friend and the buxom damsel behaved as Teniers would have liked to paint them behaving. In the small hours at Lyons I had my first glimpse of the Rhone, a great, shining, lamp-reflecting stream. Dawn showed a country unlike any France I knew—unlike by its bareness : vines everywhere, but not a tree. Here and there an almond with its fragile mass of blossom detached itself against the yellow landscape, like a puff of shell smoke and almost as unnatural. But once we had passed Valence, among the grey-green of olive leafage, these delicate pinknesses and whitenesses ceased to be exotic, and fell exquisitely into their place.

A thrill went through our carriage when the train pulled up and the porters cried a name. "*Avignon, tout le monde danse en ronde,*" chanted the Belgians. Is there anyone in the world

In Praise of France

who does not know that refrain? But the truth is that scarcely any other country in the world has been made so familiar by literature as this windswept valley of the Rhône. When I looked at the widespread low-built white houses I recognised the *mas* as Daudet and Mistral had described it a hundred times. When I saw long screens, sometimes of growing bushes or trees, sometimes of tall reeds tied together, all over that plain, and always to the south-east, I knew they were to keep the mistral from wrecking whatever tender green thing lived there. The Belgians, used to their humid greasy soil, kept asking each other how anything could grow where there seemed to be nothing but sun-scorched wind-sifted grit. The Midi of France is no place for languor: only the hardiest breed of folk could live here, facing the extremities both of heat and cold.

But after all, everybody has taken that journey: everybody knows the charm it is to see the cypress-shafts rise up darkly, to follow with the eye along avenues of ilex, and to see the first yellow clouds of blossoming mimosa. But I wonder if they all feel the same sense of magic about those names—if they are so enchanted to recognise Mont Ventoux, or the Châine des Alpilles, and to know that La Camargue lies out there to the south-west. Is not Alphonse Daudet suffering some injustice from his countrymen nowadays? They incline to

class him as *pompier*—literature for the local fire-brigade.

Yet nobody had told me about Toulon. Hyères and all the little places along to St. Tropez (the limit of my exploration) were what I expected, and very pretty, no doubt. But for beauty, none of them could hold a candle to the city which lies there under Mont Faron and Mont Coudon, crags rather than mountains, yet higher than almost anything in our islands, and so bony in their lime-white rockiness that the concrete forts on their summits seem a mere accentuation of the natural framework. Below, the streets run down to the harbour ; the town faces the exposure of land-locked water round which Cap Sepet stretches itself like a human arm. Yet just opposite the city, due south (just at the elbow joint), this protecting peninsula sinks to a mere spit of sand, and the eye travels out to the Mediterranean main. It is as if the need for beauty had been deliberately reconciled with the need for a haven.

There were some English people and Americans at the chief hotel in the square, where palm-trees grow as if they were at home : but everybody was French where I was guided. This little hotel's main door lay in a narrow back street, but its dining-room faced the harbour, and opened on to the broad flagged quay, which makes the most popular promenade in Toulon. My bedroom also

In Praise of France

faced seawards, and coming from the street one climbed a dusky stair, and traversed dim passages, to reach this long narrow chamber—dim also, for the *volets* were kept closed ; then, as you threw them open, there was a dazzle of light, air, blueness, and movement. By the water's edge were cafés and shops of all sorts, even a bookshop ; and from the dining-room we looked beyond the stream of passers-by, to where craft of every sort were in view together—battleships in the background, destroyers in the middle distance ; while the basin in the foreground had a traffic like Piccadilly Circus, or, for a much better comparison, like the Place de la Concorde, where everything is going at top speed, all ways at once, and by all the laws of probability there should be a catastrophe every five minutes. And beside one, facing all this, was the fashionable promenade, full of the most miscellaneous crowd, soldiers, sailors, boatmen, civilians, but, above all, ultra-smart French naval officers. Why is the French naval officer so much smarter than the French military officer to look at ? Perhaps because the whole service is professional, and has no element of the man promoted from the ranks. Anyhow, there the smartness is, and a very pleasant kind of smartness to look upon. Their sense of the fitting reflected itself in those ladies, by whom they were not infrequently accompanied. These were never loud in their dress, nor over-

opulent in figure : most of them indeed seemed specially designed to slip through a port-hole.

I made no acquaintance with the French navy ; but along by the eastern basin where the fishing boats lay, nets were spread out drying, nearly a hundred yards long, but only about six feet deep ; and that puzzled me. The fisherman whom I questioned explained that these were let right down to the bottom to catch langoustes : and so our talk began. There were nets of every kind there, some with the tiniest mesh I ever saw, to catch anchovies ! If it had been warmer weather I should have tried to get taken on as a spare hand in this courteous gentleman's crew. He had the pride of his craft and the instinct of it : I commented on the extraordinary knowledge he seemed to have about the habits of fish : “*Mais, monsieur,*” was his answer, “*je suis pêcheur depuis trois cent ans.*” When you have been of the craft —you or the blood in your veins—for three hundred years, you know, for instance, that sardines swim always towards the sun, so you must get to the east of them in the morning and to the west of them in the afternoon.

But in the Mediterranean, as everywhere else, fish are damnably progressive. My friend could not catch them with the tackle his father used. Fine cotton is far more expensive than the coarser thread for nets, and it doesn't last so long ; but to

In Praise of France

get the fish, you have to use fine tackle ; although by doing so, you train their eyes to be sharper than ever.

Everywhere through this country is found the same easy courteous charm. The little phrase "*à votre service*" becomes much more than a phrase where everybody is willing to go out of his way to direct you.

Also, that first day at Toulon there was the sun : the indubitable southern sun, helping to give that tall frontage of houses facing on to the basin their patina of gold—that gloss, or sheen, which is enhanced by the southern talent for the use of colour. Paris and all Northern France rigidly exclude this : but here in Toulon they could pick a green paint which even at its newest chimed in with blue sky.

At that time I was taking blue sky for granted. To see the sun, to sit in the sun, I had come south ; and there was the sun looking as if it would shine for ever. My projects were for the country ; but there seemed time enough to explore Toulon first, and next day I made out a little beyond its suburbs to La Garde.

The little church which crowns that lone hillock like a pinnacle, with mediæval houses clustering up about it, told its story of fortification : La Garde was a natural outpost there on the plain between Toulon's own mountains and the great

mass, less sharply outlined, less steep, but far-spreading, which men still call the Mountains of the Moors. When one climbed, it was plain that the church was a fortress or central keep, and about its protection the dwellings huddled, pierced by laneways so dark and narrow that it was a surprise to find habitation still lingering up here : though, naturally, La Garde had slipped away downwards, and spread itself out first over the lower slopes and then into the plain.

I was to realise that all these inland towns were so constructed. The church was at once their standard and their citadel against the formidable Saracens who remained ensconced in the mountains for centuries after the last Moor was chased out of Spain. Even after the terror was withdrawn, the towns stayed as they were planned ; but in modern times they have begun gradually to die at the top. From this eminence I had my first view of the coast-line : Hyères discernible a little to the east, with its roadstead, and lying off it the Iles d'Or, from which the scent of flowers is reputed to spread over leagues at sea. Port Cros and Porquerolles are lovely names for that romantic archipelago. Landward, we had the fort-crowned chain of chalky mountain : La Garde's mount is a foothill, yet so far detached that one could see the whole sweep and power of the range as it sprang from that glittering plain.

In Praise of France

For the sun was full on it that day, and this was the South. A grass-grown path led up to the church, where quantities of stocks were growing as wallflowers grow with us, and I sat down on coarse herbage. Scent rose about me, as if I had burst a bag of peppermint. Nothing in our North can ever be so pungently aromatic.

Then came the quest for food, and La Garde seemed to lack eating-houses. When I found one it was full of the roughest tramps and artisans. The menu included a stew of veal, in which floated artichokes cut into quarters and eatable as a whole, leaves and all : truly a succulent sustaining vegetable : no wonder one saw great fields of them. Wine was cheap if coarse, and even if the whole had cost shillings instead of francs it would have fitted an English working-man's pocket : yet nowhere in England could he get the like of it.

I pushed off then towards a pinnacled ridge which lay between La Garde and the main mountain mass ; along the road celandines in the ditch were as big as clock-faces, and the sun blazed on them and me. At the ridge a path turned off through the pines, and on the edge of it, among rosemary and lavender mingling with heather, I threw myself down and slept in the sun that afternoon of mid-February. If there is any more delightful way of knowing that you have got abroad, I shall be glad to try it.

Sleep left me, and I followed on till suddenly at the top of the ridge I came on what looked like a vast concrete water reservoir of great depth—but empty. Reflection convinced me that it was a gun position : and presumably while the fort of Coudon, two thousand feet up in the skies, was giving tongue, some other monster might bark in concealment from this lower plane. Or again, it may be a military idea now wholly exploded : and probably the whole surroundings of Toulon can be so classified, for the place is fortified at all imaginable points in all imaginable ways. Yet owing to the broken nature of the ground these military works do not disfigure : they add to the picturesqueness of the place. A party of Boy Scouts manœuvring through the pines and brushwood here completed what Stevenson calls somewhere “the innuendo of the scene.”

And all about this mysterious building were slopes deep in Mediterranean heath and all the spiky shining undergrowth that I had seen before in Morocco, but nowhere else in the world. No wonder the Moors felt at home here. And, on the other hand, no wonder France feels in the African of North Africa at least a possible Frenchman.

All along by the tramway which took me back to Toulon were little villas set among palms. I have seen these sub-tropical things growing just as freely in Kerry, and never cared for them : they

In Praise of France

do not fit the landscape. Here they were no more out of place than the orange-trees, which added their beauty, exotic to our eye, yet here entirely in the picture. The Midi is not all of France, but it is a part of it, just as much as the swamps of Picardy or the cloudy Breton cliffs.

Nobody with eyes in his head can fail to perceive that sun is what that landscape about Toulon is used to—what it is designed for : but, except for those first days and a few stray hours, sun was purely a matter of inference. The mistral asserted itself. It lost no time in forcing itself upon my acquaintance. It can come, I am told, with blue shining weather, and can disenchant even that : but it came to me with blackness, and it did its best to spoil Toulon.

Yet the place is full of surprises. There was a day when I set out to climb Mount Faron because I could get no pleasure loafing about the streets in that grey biting coldness ; but it blew worse the higher I got, till I turned tail and ran down. From the belt of pinewood on the outer ramparts, military noises reached me in strange words of command. I rounded a corner, and there was a company of Senegalese at physical exercise. They had got an easy, but the white officer in charge was wisely keeping his men warm, and they were in three groups doing native war dances such as we have all seen illustrated : one man in the middle

capering grotesquely in imitation of frog, crab, or the like, while the rest in a ring about him clapped hands and jumped in unison. But instead of naked men, these were khaki-clad, and rifle and bayonet replaced spears.

Then came a quick order, and they were set to doubling by detachments in single file. Negro soldiers walk with shambling gait like a camel's, the head thrown back, lurching forward from the knees : they ran as clumsily as raw town-bred Kitchener troops ; but they were pleasanter about it all than I ever knew Kitchener troops to be. From the doubling, they were taken to scrambling up a wall and then to jumping over a cord : a black subaltern standing by grave-faced and sturdy, while the major and a white gymnastic instructor endeavoured to teach the art of leaping. The men went at it like something much less self-conscious than schoolboys : frank, jolly laughter broke out every time a jump failed. There cannot be much wrong with people who laugh like that ; these were black men no way vulgarised by their contact with Europeans ; laughter is the first thing to show that sort of degradation. This was more than a mere index of good spirits : it showed that they were what they are in their own life, and not ashamed of being. There is a dignity in such lack of self-consciousness. Among the pine-trees other squads were marching and singing with a fine barbaric

In Praise of France

resonance : I never saw so happy a parade. There must have been two or three battalions, possibly even a brigade, of these troops in Toulon : the huge, long, southward facing barrack, a real sun-trap, was full of them : and one met them everywhere in the streets and never saw the least unpleasantness.

Of course they, like the sailors, came and went a good deal about one street near the eastern rampart, which was full of signboards—"Au Petit Flamboyant" and the like. Its reputation was lurid, but I saw no outward offence against decorum. Perhaps in warm weather its attractions would be more profusely displayed.

Down by the harbour the cafés made appeal to regional feeling, calling themselves by such names as "Au Bon Breton," and proclaiming Bière Quibéronnaise. There were even notices in Breton. The Fleet is largely recruited from the Atlantic coast, and is therefore largely Breton. One saw also "Aux Amis de Belfort," and the drooping bérrets of chasseurs Alpins in the streets explained this. That famous corps always trains at Toulon.

The market in Toulon came up to my highest standard of what a market should be. Its rows of booths were drawn out in a line which curved downhill under the plane-trees through the irregular streets of the old town, and ended in a double row, filling the little oblong *place* only one block

from the harbour. Here were many delights to the eyes : baskets of bright-coloured sea-urchins, most foreign of all foods to me. (They are said to have a charming taste of iodine.) But the chief glory was the flowers. Flowers everywhere : the flowers, cut that morning, that Paris would see a day later and London a day later still. What pinks ! what curious ranunculus ! and little *gouttes de sang* with their red drops among the green. They spread colour all through that greyness, for old Toulon is sombre, till you get to the quay and the harbour basin and the Gulf beyond it.

There, all was air and light : and buildings of the Grand Siècle, erected when Colbert was Louis XIV.'s minister, emphasised by their serene dignity the European quality of France. Nothing in them harmonised with the African. Yet it did not seem unnatural to find modern stores, roofed with corrugated iron, leaning up against this classic stonework : that is a concrete piece of French naval history—of all modern naval history, for that matter. Toulon was equipped when things could be expected to go on in a certain way for a reign or two, or a century or so. Nowadays corrugated iron is easily put up and taken away : and why spend on what a shell may so easily shatter ?

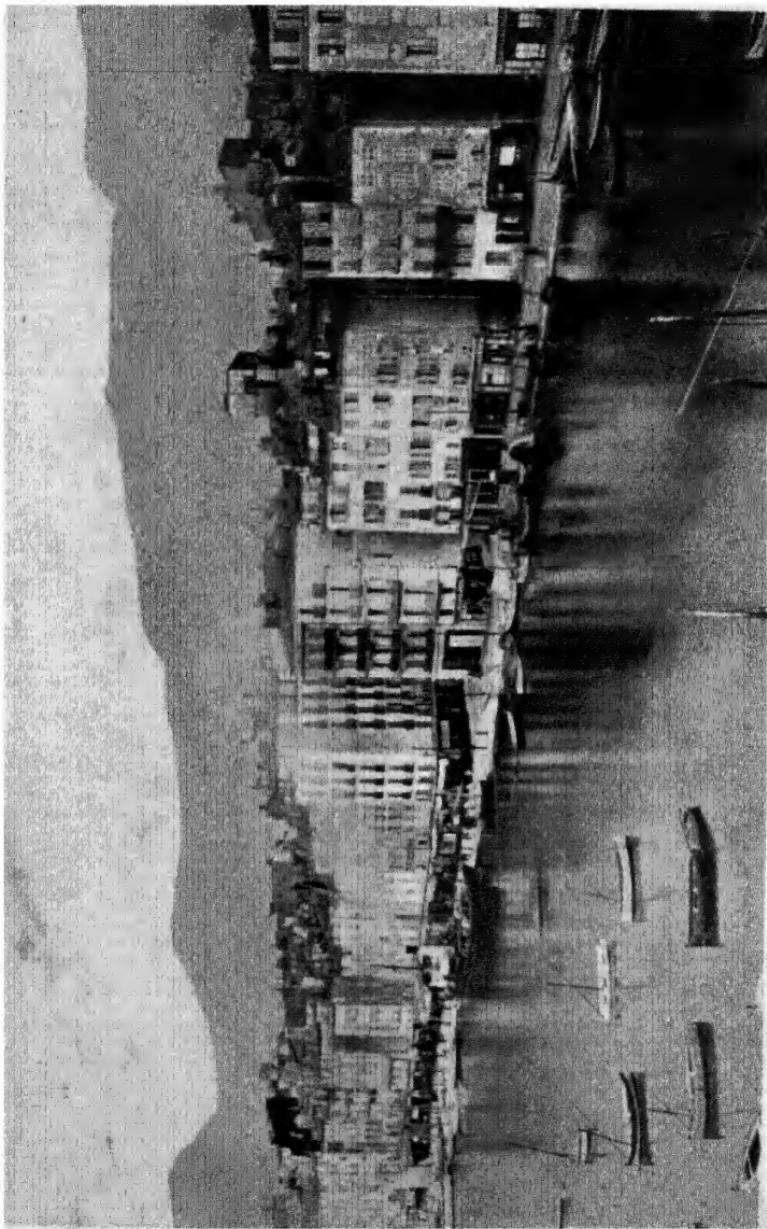
As a rule, when I have liked a town it has been

In Praise of France

partly for its restaurants. Toulon did not capture me that way. It had, of course, the charm of its wines : who does not enjoy ordering wine without knowing in the least what it will taste like, yet being sure it will taste of the grape ? The wines of the Gulf, Pampré dor, and the rest, red and white alike, were pleasant and fresh, but the most unsubstantial vintages I ever partook of. It sticks in my mind that Mr. Belloc says somewhere that the wine of Toulon is a *fausse maigre*, having intoxication of which no one would suspect it : but no such wine could I find there. Madame Jull, at whose establishment I first made trial of *bouillabaisse*, achieved that atmosphere of welcome, which is a restaurant's best attraction, and her wide window decorated with artful displays of fish was a study to the town. There was always a platter high-piled with green-shelled oysters, romantic in suggestion, but deceptive on trial : a paltry substitute for the British product, and not to be named in one day with what we breed in Galway. But there was also a dish of langoustes, in whom is no deception, and another of fish variegated in colour and fantastic in shape beyond anything that our waters yield. Ugliest of all was the *rascasse*, indispensable for the *bouillabaisse*.

More than I were interested ; for, while an excellent fish-salad detained me, I watched from within the procession of passers-by who paused

Toulon : LA VIEILLE DARSE



before passing : an elderly gentleman, officer of the Legion of Honour, with his lady, gave some moments of silent scrutiny : next, a tram conductor left his tram to see what novelty might be on view : then three ladies, two of whom, after an interval, returned, showed assuredly a professional interest--either wishing to convince themselves that the langoustes had gone off colour, or else wanting to know where on earth she got them so good. "If all were customers that stopped here," said Madame Jull with a sigh, "I could not complain of business."

One evening, for I had found a friend passing through Toulon, we made a serious exploration. Messieurs Rouff and Curnonsky in their study of *La France Gastronomique* had discovered that cattle dealers eat particularly well, and consequently that the neighbourhood of a cattle market is worth investigating. Cattle markets and slaughter-houses must go together, for in Toulon the abattoir had been the landmark by which they steered into the "Grand Cerf," of which Toulon at large knows so little that we also had to find the abattoir first ; and thence we were directed to our haven. It lies beside a great open space, which presumably is a fair-green at times. At all events, this little old house, with its narrow openings on two streets, bore a sign proclaiming a conjunction which I have never met elsewhere : for the Grand

In Praise of France

Cerf is not only a restaurant, but *Marchand de Bestiaux*.

The narrow passage led into a central flagged room, part laundry, part pantry, where were women preparing vegetables : the little kitchen led off it, so also did a little room with four or five small tables—the restaurant. The furniture was Second Empire—the French equivalent of Early Victorian. A wood-burning stove crackled pleasantly, electric light glared unshaded, and there was no trace of a cattle-dealer about the premises. Still, for them it is designed, though that seemed strange when the serving-maid brought in a pigeon with infinitesimal green peas—how delicate, but not more exquisite than the little bird which was divided between us. A Yorkshire farmer would blow such a portion from him with one snort of indignation : an Irish cattle-dealer would sweep it away in one swooping movement of his knife, and be unaware that he had swallowed. France pushes her cultivation of the palate into all ranks and quarters.

Since my holiday was short, it was time to be moving, and I went for advice to the amiable old French lawyer to whom I had introductions. But when I said I wanted to go to Collobrières, he protested passionately that nobody ever went there : that it was twenty kilometres from anywhere, away up in the middle of the forest, with nothing to see.

His friend, the old *bâtonnier* of the local bar, conceded to me that these might be perfectly good reasons for wishing to go ; but neither of them could help, and my unaided talent justified itself.

For if Collobrières was almost as far from the nearest wayside station as from Toulon itself, there must certainly be a motor service ; and sure enough, a motor lorry daily took in parcels and passengers, and daily fetched them out. Since it started in the afternoon, it left me only daylight to see the plain country which we traversed first. Broad level spaces stretched away north of the road, and everywhere showed the olive and the vine : not separate, for here in Provence culture is not scientific : old men can remember when the vine was left to run at its own sweet will. Nowadays, here as elsewhere, it is tied up to the *échalias*, or stake of wood ; but it has to fight the olive roots for the sap of the soil. We came to Pierrefeu, another of these towns climbing up a pointed hillock, and beyond that the lands grow more level and more rich : here were serious vineyards, containing nothing but vines, some of very large extent. Then as dark fell, we began to draw uphill and into forest : till finally after a drive of some three hours the autobus shot me out at the door of a large gaunt hotel.

All seemed hermetically sealed ; but after much knocking a tall black-robed woman, who had a

In Praise of France

presence, admitted me, and I was shown into a large dining-room with a huge hearth on which logs smouldered. Mademoiselle Marie, as I learnt to call her, threw on pine-cones, and there was a blessed blaze. The thought of it cheered me through dark passages to my dingy room, tile-floored : and I hurried down again. There were other guests, some of them working-men, as usual wearing the cap or hat : another, marked off by omission of this detail, was paying them from large wads of notes. Woodsmen they were, I discovered later, from a pleasant young Frenchman here on a stay of convalescence : and the payer-out, an Italian timber speculator. I had, indeed, been vaguely puzzled about his French, but all French in this Provençal country is a little odd.

One thing stood out : the personal distinction of the craftsmen, and its lack in their employer. I have never seen a country where good looks, and even beauty, was so frequent among men. Lean they were mostly and tall, dark-eyed, with a subtilisation of lines in the face which is probably Saracen. If Jean Aicard is right, who has done for this country what Martin Ross and Edith Somerville did for Carbery and Connemara, there is a deal of Saracen blood left in the Maures. It was at Collobrières that I became acquainted with Jean Aicard's hero, " Maurin des Maures," the *braconnier* (which in Les Maures means only profes-

sional sportsman, for there are no preserves), who is also a popular leader, and, in one word, a Playboy of Provence. Nobody who has read even the first half of these two volumes can feel wholly a stranger in that region, and I am grateful to M. Aicard, who was also, it seems, a great pioneer of education. Incidentally, his book is a document on the current French ideals of manliness and sportsmanship—a pendant to Mr. Kipling.

For looks, men have it against the ladies in Provence : indeed, my most vivid picture of Provençal women comes from Collobrières. That evening, looking for a candle and seeing none, I knocked at a door outside the *salle-à-manger*, and was bidden enter. There sat Mademoiselle Marie, surrounded by six or seven dames, all in black, all in the fifties or sixties, and all a little grim. Among them was one jolly black-whiskered man of the same age—Mademoiselle Marie's brother, the chef. The young Frenchmen told me when I inquired that some of these inmates were employees, some “*vaguement, des parents.*” Anyhow, next morning my coffee and rolls came up in procession carried by two of these solemn figures, black, gaunt, and slightly moustachioed. Heaven knows help was plenty in that household, but they left the cooking to a man : and he justified the prestige of his sex. There were infinitesimal lamb cutlets of his confection (in February) that carry a perfume

In Praise of France

in the mention : and, indeed, every dish had a suggestion of some of the aromatic herbs which grow around them : and never, let me add, of garlic.

Collobrières must be one of the most attractive places I ever fell into, for I lost my heart to it. Yet it rained there : how it rained ! There was a brief clearing at breakfast-time, and I got out, to find the town built along a rapid stream with tree-planted alleys following its course : and the road was blocked with sheep being driven, as I thought, to or from a fair. Then the rain drove me in to solace myself with "Maurin" till it cleared, and I struggled out again. To my amazement the streets were pervaded by top-hats : yet not ceremoniously. It was Ash Wednesday, but there was nothing funereal in these knots of boys who swaggered about : they were evidently guisards, which is as good a word in Provence as in Scotland. Collobrières and such-like places run their carnival on to the second day. Maurin and his creator would have agreed that they take their religion gaily in the Midi.

There was a Carthusian monastery in the Maures till the suppression : I cannot but think of it in terms of Daudet's adorable story about the Père Gaucher, the lay brother who revived the fortunes of his order by brewing an "elixir," but found that in the process of concoction his soul fell into peril. The Chartreuse de la Verne is now a place only for

pilgrimage or curiosity : it is a reasonable walk from Collobrières, which might possibly be managed in the afternoon : I set out.

The road which leads to La Verne follows the little river, and on each side the hills sloped back : at first the trees were chestnuts, all bare, old trunks, gnarled and contorted : but soon, on the opposite side of the valley, I was looking at timber strange to me : a pile of bark at the bottom told me they were cork-trees. Here and there a red stem showed recent stripping : Maupassant in the end of his days ran mad among that sombre colour, crying out that the world was full of blood. The road forked, and I mounted by long windings through steep ravines. Grey as the sky was, everything was full of colour : russet of dried bracken, earth ruddy where it was broken, russet on pine trunks, when one reached their level. Here I was puzzled by a huge pile on the road, apparently of flower-pots. A woodman enlightened me : they were for tapping resin : and he showed me a score of young pines with a sliver cut out of them, and tin spouts fastened on, making a funnel below which the pot was tied. All these drippings are collected into crocks, and sell for a high price : certainly the French know their job of woodcraft.

The sun had come out, and the track to La Verne—still ten kilometres off—looked less attrac-

In Praise of France

tive than the main road with its winding, upward gradient, sunlit between the pines. On and on I went, round corner after corner, until at last from a ravine on my left came a stream which plainly must run eastwards : I was on the watershed of the Maures, and soon came a long stretch of road almost flat. The sun was gaining strength, there was gold in the colour ; and now, looking back, Coudon and Faron were in sight ; the whole of that beautiful range, fifteen miles off, was silhouetted in the deepest indigo. But the sky for all its beauty was threatening : I turned and footed it back over pine needles soft to the feet : everywhere about me the scent of pine, the noise of running water and the impression of a thousand little lovelinesses that you cannot see from a motor-car—or if you see, you cannot feel them, they have not time to sink in. The only way to enjoy and to possess new country is to walk it.

The road by which I had come serpented widely, but there were foot-tracks leading down to a presumable straight path at the bottom. Some woodmen were at work tapping more pines ; and once more I was struck by the young men's beauty, and it was heightened by the courtesy which seems more universal and charming here than I have ever met it in France. Unlike most natives of a place, they did not assume that a stranger could never find his way, and by their counsel I plunged down this first and most direct footpath.

'It was a good track to begin with, but after a fashion footpaths have, it left me half-way down, among Mediterranean heath man-high, and arbutus and genista and the like, with the pale boughs of chestnut overhead. That jungle gave me a sense of complete strangeness, so different was it to any of our vegetation. But presently I was at the stream-bed, where a rough cart-track led me along, in drenching rain, till as I got out again on the main road it lightened, and suddenly some trees on the top of a ridge to my right showed up so brilliant that I took them for great mimosas. Then I knew them for cork-trees with the low sun blazing through them. All else was dark : I did not even know where the sun was, till, rounding a corner, the hillside on my left was illumined as I have never seen anything. Every trunk stood out in high relief from root to top : the chestnuts were silver-washed on a groundwork of hill slope that ran from sheer gold to golden russet : and in the middle of it all, one cork stem showed literal and absolute vermillion. Away out higher to the right trees were sparser, and the whole was purple shot with gold. Standing there in grey darkness and looking at the radiance, the hillside seemed unreal : all was clear in the utmost definition ; not a leaf stirred : it was enchantment. Gradually the glow climbed up and up till it was gone altogether from the hill ; only pink clouds moved swiftly and

In Praise of France

steadily through the Eastern sky, while the West, from which the light still poured, was wet and golden, and the old church of Collobrières stood up in a gap, outlined against amber and crimson. The temptation to see more took me scrambling up, and I found myself in the deserted quarter of what had been once a hill town. From beside the church I looked down on the cup in which Collobrières to-day prefers to nestle, in streets which, although narrow, are boulevards compared with these dark and sinister alleys huddled against the hill.

There was gaiety in the new streets, and much noise of merriment : the Ash Wednesday carnival was now in full swing, and with blowing of bugles, beating of drums, and waving of battered top-hats, all the world was swept into the dance hall beside the bridge. I found a quieter café, where sat three somnolent gentlemen, all of whom had the air of ostentatiously separating themselves from these silly goings-on. Perhaps they had been crossed in love. Having drunk a glass of “fenouillet,” the local liqueur (fennel has a dull taste, and I would never risk my soul for that elixir), I made my way back to the hotel, where the jolly chef entertained me with stories of boar-hunting. At night you go out, shod with *espadrilles*, the rope-soled slippers which are much worn here, and steal along to one of the glades which the *sanglier* fre-

quents : you can hear him routing and snorting, you can smell him (but unless you are very careful he can hear and smell you), you approach to within a few yards, you have a white mark on the sight of your gun ; and then, either by the moonlight or by switching on the light of an electric-torch, you draw your bead on him and *pan !*

Next morning I perceived that for several hundred yards along the boulevard by the river, cork bark was stacked in a continuous rampart ten feet deep and man-high. Investigating this, I met again flocks of sheep and of goats going forth, and realised that these creatures were nightly stabled in the town. They are a great part of the wealth here, and an old man with whom I fell in told me that their sheep bred twice yearly. How that brought up Virgil—

Bis gravidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos.

But this shepherd took no stock in apples. What they lived by was the cork and the chestnuts—and the pine timber. But the other two gave most of the employ : cork especially. A tree is only partially stripped, and the bark renews itself in twelve years. I could not think how the sap ran until I noted in a felled cork trunk that there is an under-layer of bark through which the life flows. There were several little factories in the place for steeping and softening the rolls of bark, and then for cutting

In Praise of France

the corks out of them. The chestnuts also had their *fabrique*, turning out huge quantities of *marrons glacés* and also a delicious conserve of chestnuts in syrup: and a kind of *purée de châtaignes* made of broken nuts that have crumbled in the cooking.

A little walk that second morning made me feel that Collobrières was a hard place to quit; the woods were full of byroads and cart tracks, and every one of them seemed to lead to some surprising or delightful haunt. I should love to explore more fully the intricacies of all those converging forest glens and ravines and the whole old world place with its old world industries. But an old world two-horse diligence took me back after *déjeuner* to the train at Cuers, in the wide valley of the Gapeau, which flows out at Hyères.

This valley cuts the steep chalky cliffs of Coudon, Faron, and that range off from the rolling forest-clad granitic masses in which Collobrières lies: and it continues right away round the Maures, reaching a low watershed, from which the Argens runs eastward into the Mediterranean at Fréjus, dividing the Maures from the Esterel.

I saw the Esterel for the first time next day. The train had taken me from Toulon along the coast by Hyères; and for that occasion the sun shone, and one got innumerable glimpses of embayed shore under pines with children paddling that

February morning—the Riviera of picture post-cards. But at La Foux, the junction for St. Tropez, there was time to stroll (there is always time, I should say, at La Foux), and I saw eastward of me cloudy purple heights rising from the sea and running back inland: noble mountain shapes. Then the little branch line train puffed aggressively along three or four miles of open roadway, and I was at the port of St. Tropez.

The first impression was of sheer beauty. The port is on the inner side of a large promontory, and it faces the main coast, just opposite where the undulating ridges of the Maures join up to the high peaks of the Esterel. Facing the quay is a long façade of tall houses, splashed and stained with paint as one sees them on the Genoese Riviera. And the quay was lined with a multitude of sailing vessels, all of the same schooner rig. Not a trace of motor or steamer. Up among the Maures horse-drawn traffic is still more common than anywhere else I know, but the Mediterranean is more conservative even than the Maures, whose port it was.

For they say a corsair put in here under stress of weather somewhere about 800 B.C., or earlier. By that time the Saracens had been driven back out of France: but they still held the sea, and this coast from Marseilles to the Alps, with its clifffy front, its innumerable bays and deep water,

In Praise of France

offered endless havens where landing could be swiftly made for a foray. But the raiders had no base of operations on land, till this chance adventurer, looking out from where his ship got shelter so easily, to all the maze of wooded mountain, conceived a strategic idea : he fetched his comrades in force, and, pushing a few miles inland, they fortified themselves impregnably in the forest. La Garde Freinet was the name this central stronghold got. From it other posts were pushed out through the whole mountain system : and watches were kept on all the headlands so that a ship coasting along (and no ship then willingly lost sight of land) was marked down and announced by smoke signal, till, a little farther along, out shot the galleys.

This lasted for more than a hundred years (about the time when the Norse were harrying the British Isles), till a day came when William, Count of Provence, finally captured La Garde Freinet and broke the Saracen power. But a Saracen population remained in the district, and was distinct for another 300 years. These old pirates may have been the ancestors of French seamen. In the centre of the quay just under my hotel was a statue of Suffren, one of the greater glories of France by sea : he was a noble of this remote and lovely place, and may well have had the blood of corsairs in him.

Strolling about the quay I learnt that all the cargo boats had one occupation—carrying sand for building purposes to the Riviera, and coming back with provisions or the like. Behind the town was a hill, crowned with an old-fashioned citadel looking seawards : English attacks on it came into the story. But somehow St. Tropez, for all its beauty, was a place where I failed to make contact.

Yet there at least I saw sun and the South. Shut in among walls behind the hotel was a great orange-tree, so hung with golden fruit as one might see it in a dream.

Next day I sent my baggage by train, and set out on foot to explore the hilly wooded peninsula on whose eastern face St. Tropez lies. A couple of miles along the flat road brought me to a landmark—the huge pine which here stands in the roadway. For safety its head has been lopped, but there is the trunk—Heaven knows of what girth : I never saw such a tree. It figures in *Maurin*, as do all landmarks. Maurin's original after whom the sketches were made, lived, I am told, near La Foux, as, indeed, the book suggests.

Close to the Grand Pin a road struck off west, towards Gassin, my objective, and on this level stretch I solved a puzzle. All through Provence I had been seeing pollarded trees of a sort unfamiliar, and here there were two rows of them.

In Praise of France

Mulberries, so pruned as to produce precisely the big upright switches avoided in apple-pruning, for they grow leaf profusely and no fruit. But silk-worms eat leaves, not berries.

Presently, high up on a peak, I saw Gassin : and a bye-road climbed to it through cork forest : strange trunks, fantastic in shape and colour, with endless knottinesses and bulgings, emphasised by the stripping of great rings of bark, three or four feet at a time. At the top, a wayside crucifix marked the beginnings of the town, whose high plateau is a lovely perch. East and north, from beside the inevitable crowning church, one looked across the bay of St. Tropez to the Esterel : on a luckier day, Alpine snow would have showed beyond it. West and south, delighting the eye was blue dazzle of sea beyond the deeply indented coast, and the shimmer of sun on sloping banks of forest. But then I looked for a place to get food and drink, and found neither—no, not even drink. There were two places of entertainment, but both the proprietors were out for the day. All that Gassin could produce was some bad bread and worse cheese. These mountainy forest people are very poor : the admirable leanness of Provençal men-folk does not come simply by voluntary abstinence.

Yet in all that pleasant country I do not think there can be misery. Corn, wine, and oil are

cheaply come by ; everyone who has a patch of land can grow them. And when I reached La Foux and welcome food at the station restaurant, it was a merry life that flowed back and forward there, under the umbrella pines which spread shelter outside the station. A large party of simple people were taking their pleasure at a table near-by ; fifteen or sixteen more came in, joy-riding on a timber lorry commandeered for the purpose : the bright dresses of the girls were gay under the sombre pines. I suppose it is the pines which keep Provence from seeming either frivolous or merely pretty. “ My solemn Provençal country, to my mind a better Italy ” ; that was how Sir Charles Dilke described it, who came back here each winter for more than half his long life. Sombre contrasts seem natural here, and not sinister ; as when umbrella pines darkly overarch a vista, through which your eye runs to meet fluffy clouds of mimosa blossom.

But there is one thing to be said about Provence : it requires the sun. Nobody there affects to regard rain as anything but an outrage. As I sat waiting for a trap to come down and carry me and my baggage to Grimaud, the day was overcast, rain came on, and all of Provence that was in sight fled from it indignantly protesting. Then up came my driver having a closed conveyance : and he needed no pressing to wait until the weather

In Praise of France

should mend. As I spoke to him, a cyclist passed, well waterproofed and pedalling hard for St. Tropez, which he would reach in quarter of an hour : but the driver looked at him with amazement. "*C'est un loufoque,*" he said. Nobody but "a looney" would be out while it rained. The activities of Provence must be considerably hampered in the months of February and March : for no inhabitants seemed to regard the weather which I encountered as exceptional.

It clean spoilt for me my next days : Grimaud on the foothills of the Maures is a sodden memory : La Garde Freinet, through which I drove in an autobus on the way to Draguignan, is scarcely even that : and of Draguignan itself, the seat of the prefecture, my impressions are scarcely worth setting down. Yet I have not forgotten the welcome of that excellent spacious provincial hotel, good to reach after a long wet drive from Grimaud ; even in wintry weather its red-tiled floors reminded one of summer. And the town was charming, with its wide orderly modern streets grafted on to the grey old mediæval town which had even comprised a Jewry : the derelict synagogue was among its oldest buildings. To-day the Jew rolls into Draguignan on his Daimler ; he slinks no more through dark alleys where the gaberdine was all the wear.

But Draguignan is older than the Middle Ages.

It is a place where I found myself more aware than ever before in my life of ancient Rome. What a gulf dividing us ! yet how near to us, how modern, is what lies beyond the gulf ! After Cæsar had been killed, Antony, setting up the Cæsarian standard, fell back on Gaul : and in Gaul two great personages, Lepidus and Plaucus, held huge commands. We have their clear well-worded letters to Cicero, that other modern, telling how they were moving on the Aurelian Road, which followed the same line as the modern railway, through the valley of the Argens. Antony's army approached Fréjus : Lepidus, coming down from Lyons, got first on the ground, and took up his position across the Pont d'Argens, five or six miles from Draguignan. But there was no battle : these civilised personages settled the matter between themselves, the triumvirate resulted, and that was the end of the Republic. One can read it all as plainly as if the messages passed yesterday : the record, nearly 2,000 years old, is in a language still universally known. But ask for information about what happened in the valley of the Argens 300, 500, 1,000 years, nearer to our time, and all is one black welter of confusion : Saracen, Lombard, Frank, God knows who, rolling and tumbling and destroying.

For still Rome's work stands. Not so much that there is a piece of an aqueduct at Grimaud, or

In Praise of France

fragments of Roman masonry in the Pont d'Argens where Lepidus made his camp—but that Roman ideas of government, engineering and discipline are evident in all that Draguignan, or any other prefecture in France, stands for.

Still, I come back from the Midi with the sense of having encountered something older even than Rome : something nearer to the original focal source of Mediterranean civilisation. Rome constructed, but Greece planted : it was Greece that brought to Gaul the vine, the olive, and, if history be true, not only these but corn also. The Midi, in its extreme characteristic form, may be Neapolitan : it is not Roman : and the only place where I got the full taste of it was in Marseilles, which, like Naples, is a Greek town by origin. Even Toulon differed no more from the north than, say, Plymouth does from Yorkshire : but at Marseilles I could well believe that there exists a France of the Midi, as different from normal France as Ireland is from England. To understand France, and the strength that is in France, one needs to look close at Marseilles.

Exploration began with a disappointment. The Canebière was like any other big street in a prosperous French town : its crowd of business men were dressed as soberly as anywhere else in France. Perhaps the stream of traffic ran stronger than elsewhere, for it ends on the quay, and

Marseilles grows up out of its harbour. These southern French seaboard towns weld themselves to the life of their port as English ones do not : Liverpool all looks away from its shipping. Marseilles, even more than Toulon, converges on it : it encircles the huge basin.

I walked down by the east of this inner harbour to get a view of the lead seawards, and soon found myself on the terrace of the Ecole de Médécine—having passed the fort. Cliffs stretched away to the left of me towards the clifly island that is the Château d'If : cliffs faced me across the bay : and water of a blue that suggested cliff depths was at my feet. Then I dropped back to the harbour and crossed it by the huge mechanical ferry swung between two Eiffel towers : a company of infantry could easily find room on that travelling piece of roadway. All is on a big scale in Marseilles.

Following a cliff road high above the sea, I pushed on to where the new cathedral overlooks the outer port, in which lie ocean-going vessels. It was crowded : everything in Marseilles is crowded : and as I watched, a big liner was being hauled out, stern foremost, a lack of decorum to which I cannot see the British captain submitting : it was ugly but swift and efficacious. On the terrace from which I watched, fishermen's nets were spread to dry : they were hung even on the railings about the church : I cannot imagine the

In Praise of France

British dean who would submit to this familiarity. The Midi has no feeling for being properly dressed on parade. Yet the rheumy beggar at the church gate, the elderly weather-worn women filing into the church, all had something homely and friendly : religion is alive here ; everything in Marseilles has vitality. A bishop's mass was being said in commemoration of some bishop, who died that day, fifty or sixty years ago : the impressive ceremony looked small in the corner of that vast building. Saint Jean Joseph's shrine was crowded, I forget why : but I remember the look of a young mother kneeling there with her baby.

Turning back then, I entered St. Laurent's Church at the angle between the inner and the outer basin. It was said to be frequented by fishermen, and I looked to find votive offerings such as one sees in Brittany : but there was no sign of them. A catechism class was in progress and well-policed children sat there decorously in the dim religious light ; but at the doorway in the irreligious sun, unregenerate brats of boys sheltering from the wind played cards on the church steps : and others kicked a football which came bouncing into the porch. Irreligion also in Marseilles has its vitality.

Then I walked back towards the Canebière and the main business quarter along the west side of the basin, and it was here that I got my central

impression of Marseilles. Having skirted the basin I looked across from the other side, near the seaward end of the Cannebières. What I saw was a sort of sunlit cliff of houses, white for the most part, the line at the top irregular, as it would be on a cliff, and the whole appearing like a stage scene, with no depth or solidity. Yet, having walked past it, I knew it fissured and rifted every fifty yards with long dark clefts running back into a huge mass of close-packed habitation.

Up to noon, sun strikes into these chasms, and you see the narrow streets all a-flutter with washing in incredible quantities, dripping and drying. On the floor of these recesses is a swarming of persons endlessly coming and going to and from the broad sun-washed quay. Yet many of them pause to dive into one of the stairways, darkness within the dark, which must lead up to other unseen swarms ; for the people of these old by-streets, crowded as they are, cannot all be out on the cobble-stones, among the ordure and the orange peel, the potato parings, and other garbage. Seen from across the harbour, as you drink your coffee on the verandah at Basso's, this quarter of Marseilles looks so gay : seen from near, I have never met anything so sinister. In Moorish towns twenty years ago, when the European had no protection, no thought of danger ever crossed my mind : here every lane gave the apprehension

In Praise of France

of a cut-throat ambush. Police are on the quays : but I saw none in the back streets ; they keep wisely in the sun. No imaginable army of gendarmes could police that accumulation of Latins, Greeks, and Jews, with many a stray sailor, Englishman, Yankee, or Dane, dropping in from the Atlantic and the Baltic, to add his vices to the medley : and over and above the whites were black and brown of every shade—African, Lascar, Annamite, God knows what. A stupefying place. Sun does not really penetrate these depths : only, as you might say, to the ankles. Everywhere were coarse brutalised women, brutalised children, and occasionally old women, to whom resignation gave a kind of dignity : but on the whole, a place where all contacts seemed brutal and violent.

These are superficial impressions, for I lacked time to linger in Marseilles : perhaps I lacked inclination, for the place repelled me, who am too much a Northerner. But Marseilles cannot leave any perceptive creature indifferent.

It is well to choose your hotel carefully. Mine was too near a salt-fish shop ; and above the noises of the streets came to me the caterwauling of women.

There may be ugliness in these suggestions, and Marseilles has much to revolt one ; but the place is strong enough to carry away ugly details in an

overpowering sense of life. Its physical conformation, the ups and downs of it, are such that every turn brings a fresh view, till mere variety creates a vivid charm ; and whenever blue sea enters into the picture, as well as blue sky, Marseilles comes by its own peculiar heritage of beauty.

Toulon also is by physical conditions essentially a Southern city. But Toulon is disciplined and serene : it belongs to the French Army and Navy, and by that reason is national—not provincial. Marseilles is civilian to the core, and, spiritually as well as racially, incomparably more of the Midi. The black man looks a stranger in Toulon : at Marseilles, even in uniform, he is scarcely noticeable : in civilian clothes he is part of the picture—or of the nightmare.

The streets of Toulon are narrow, high, and squalid : but one sees to the end of them, and at the end is sea or mountain—or, anyhow, light. In Marseilles they all burrow towards some black unseen centre. That is the way with streets in every Oriental town, and the Greeks who founded Marseilles were of the Eastern, not the Western Mediterranean. Marseilles has never forgotten nor got away from the stamp of the Levant.

For a rapid impression, especially in France, the characteristic restaurants are to be sought ; and (once more by the advice of Messrs. Rouff and

In Praise of France

Curnonsky) I took steps to dine at Pascal's and eat *bouillabaisse* in its native home. Do not be persuaded to order langouste to be included : saffron, the fundamental condiment in this dish, is a wicked leveller of flavours and the strong taste of bay leaves is the ruin of this noble crustacean. Eat him apart. But I should certainly recommend Pascal's for local colour. It stands a little back from the west quay in the Place Thiers among sombre tall buildings decently remote from squalor ; and at night it is very impressive. The restaurant consists of two large plainly furnished rooms with a kitchen between them : there is a big terrace where one can eat out of doors in hot weather. But even in cold weather the waiters at Pascal's were attired in their shirt sleeves : the *chic Marseillais* requires an element of the *débraillé*, the unbuttoned. Your menu assures you that the different dishes are cooked over fires of different wood : grilling, for instance, is done with *braise de sarment* (vine stock embers) ; and for proof, as you pass in you can see the kitchen with the various heaps of embers, and spits turning over them. I noticed also that the ladies who frequented Pascal's had a certain exuberance : they were much larger, much less discreetly painted than those of Toulon.

If anything were needed to drive home the unlikeness of Marseilles to normal France, it is a

visit to Lyons : and there I broke my journey on the way back. Everything in M. Herriot's town is so decent, so orderly, so well aligned, so sober in its proportion, that I am sure no waiter in the smallest café in the hottest weather ever permits himself to be seen in shirt sleeves. The *Foire de Lyon* happened to be in progress, and its building also was a model of symmetrical arrangement—stuffed with monuments to the vulgarity of average modern French taste. Yet among these horrors were many things admirable in design and workmanship.

But the most remarkable feature of Lyons to my mind is a restaurant—the triumph of feminism. In it la Mère Fillioux served twice daily to all-comers exactly the same perfect meal—at the same considerable cost of twenty-five francs. And all your money goes for eating : the place is a jumble of little rooms set with little tables, where everybody jostles everybody else over his or her (but, generally, his) “ fowl in half mourning,” and the sequent elaborations, into all of which truffles and *foie gras* seemed to enter as ingredients. Almost everybody drank merely the *ordinaire*, last year's Beaujolais—but what an *ordinaire* ! Madame Fillioux is wine merchant as well as restaurateur, and I suspect the restaurant of being a kind of draw for her other commerce. At all events, from what I saw, there can be no doubt of the success of her simple and masterly conception. How simple

In Praise of France

and masterly, I should never have discovered for myself, though the facts were evident. In order to reach the primitive cloak-room (for there was no space in the *salles* to hang a coat), it was necessary to pass through the kitchen, and I found it peopled exclusively by serving wenches. No trace of a chef, except the somewhat corpulent and masterful lady who pervaded whatever space there was. When I reported this fact to a friend learned in cookery, she out of her knowledge revealed the heart of Madame Fillioux's strategy. No chef is needed when the same menu has to be repeated seven hundred and fifty times per annum : and no chef could be got, for no man would tolerate the monotony. Is it, after all, a triumph of feminism ?

Yet where but in France would such a restaurant be possible ? Where but in France would its fame be so universally diffused as to maintain a stream of pilgrims to that monotonous perfection of ritual throughout the year ?

Alas ! that even as this record appears I should need a funereal postscript. Chance encounter with a Lyonnais on his road to Dublin apprised me that la Mère Fillioux had cooked and eaten her last meal. The *poule en demi-deuil* should be all black with truffles henceforward.

VIII

THE CLASSICS OF THE TABLE

SINCE French cookery is the best in Europe, the classics of gastronomy belong naturally to French literature ; and perhaps English readers do not sufficiently realise that such works exist and are delightful reading—first, because, like books on sport, they are records of enjoyment. But eating covers a larger field in life than fishing, hunting, golf, or even gardening ; the history of the table is closely connected with the history of civilisation.

“ Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are,” is an aphorism in the chief of these classics, and “ how you eat ” is even more important to ascertain. Man is not only gregarious, but a social animal : nutrition, the first animal need, links itself rapidly with necessities for companionship that involve his spirit ; and ultimately he shows himself for what he is in the act of eating and of assisting others to eat. Hospitality is one of the pleasantest expressions of humanity, and the French traditional quality of politeness is never more admirably displayed than in the care which they constantly take to devise entertainment for a

In Praise of France

guest. To plan a good repast you must be able to appreciate it, and to appreciate you must enjoy ; in this respect the French have always studiously qualified for their duty as hosts. Also, they have constantly taken the view of the old noble who dressed ceremonially when he dined alone, saying that no more respected guest sat at his table. But with the French this self-respect expressed itself in the dinner rather than in the dress.

France's supremacy in the gastronomic art is comparatively recent. Cooks and cookery perished in the dark ages except along the Mediterranean, where civilisation was oldest ; and at the Renaissance this learning also had to be diffused from Italy. Still we know that the other arts blossomed with extraordinary speed and vigour in France when the impulse came, and it is hard to believe that a French omelette of the fifteenth century was not already all that an omelette should be. Yet maybe it lacked one thing—pepper. Cookery, like war, has developed out of knowledge in modern times. Pepper certainly existed in the early Middle Ages, but it was scarce, like all the spices, till the mariner's compass and Columbus and the rest brought strange new material from across the ocean. Coffee was offered for sale in Paris first at the Foire de St. Germain in 1670. Liqueurs were only invented by the combined device of chemists and cooks to warm the old age

of Louis XIV., and they were not in common use until the time of his successor. Even sugar was almost a rarity in the seventeenth century. From the Grand Siècle onwards it may be said that the art possessed all its necessary resources, and made great strides ; but though there were cooks, they at best, like the early painters, received merely verbal commendation. Criticism as a branch of literature scarcely begins before the eighteenth century ; and to cookery it was only applied after a social upheaval had threatened to abolish this most social of all the arts. There were, of course, technical treatises, some dating away back into the Middle Ages ; but the modern literature of the kitchen begins with Grimod de la Reynière, and though he was a forerunner and founded a school, he actually outlived Brillat-Savarin, the creator of its masterpiece. Both men were, as Balzac puts it, astride of two centuries ; both saw the transition from the old régime to the new, and both wrote under the stimulus of this change. They felt the impulse to express an enjoyment which the circumstances of their time had rendered more vivid, and also to characterise the great alteration in manners which they had observed.

Anybody interested in the curious and morbid phase of Parisian society which preceded the Revolution will find it remarkably lit up by the study of Grimod de la Reynière and his group,

In Praise of France

published by M. Desnoiresterres in 1877. His father was a *fermier-général*, and immensely rich. Tradition relates that the fortunes of the family began in a sausage-maker's shop, and that the author of the *Almanach des Gourmands* delighted to embellish his apartments with festoons of sausages. It is probable that Grimod did this, or anything else that could annoy his parents ; but he was certainly no sausage-maker's son : the dynasty of tax-farmers whose opulence he inherited was richly established a century before the Revolution. The second of these died at Paris in 1754, of an indigestion caused by *pâté de foie-gras*. He kept the best table in Paris, and Voltaire wrote him a letter requesting that the poet's cook might be allowed to assist for a few days in the financier's kitchen. "A cook grows rusty in an invalid's establishment," Voltaire wrote, "and the fine arts ought to be encouraged." Grimod de la Reynière the third, succeeding to his share of a fortune reckoned at fourteen million (in francs, it is true, but still not a bagatelle), succeeded also to the tax-farming post, and looked out for a distinguished marriage. The bride was Mlle. de Jarente, niece to the Bishop of Orleans, and she always resented an alliance that put her out of the Court circle : it was said that she was an excellent hostess, but suffered from attacks of pedigree. Her husband, whom society liked and laughed at, built her a

superb house in the Champs Élysées (now the Club des Champs Élysées) ; a wit called it the “ leading tavern for men of quality.” One of the grand seigneurs who condescended to frequent it consoled his host on having to give up one or other of two jobs. “ What matter, my dear man ; it’s only a million to write off, and that won’t stop us from coming to dine with you.”

In this household, or vaguely attached to it, Alexandre Balthasar Laurent Grimod de la Reynière grew up. His mother had no time to bestow on him ; also, though clever and well-looking, this son of hers had a shocking disfigurement ; his arms ended in mere stumps ; he had to use artificial hands, and learnt not only to write, but to paint passably with them. His nature had much of that furious concentration which often goes with deformity. After a tour in Switzerland (but to the Switzerland of Voltaire and Rousseau, to see the Swiss and study their philosophic virtues), he came back, was petted by actresses, young and old, and took to writing dramatic criticism. Also, while living in his father’s luxuriously appointed home, he gratified his taste for eccentricity by alliance with fantastic persons. One of these, a man of education and no character, had become a public letter-writer in the streets : another, beginning as a butcher, had turned philosopher, supporting himself alternately by house-decorating and tavern-

In Praise of France

keeping. They sponged on the rich youth, who preferred, he said, to have intimates about whose motives there could be no illusion. However, these oddities not satisfying him, he launched portentous invitations to a supper party. The actual guests were seventeen, including one lady dressed as a man. Guests were ushered in by armed retainers ; a knight in full armour collected the invitation cards ; a legal personage, in wig and gown, noted the names. At ten the supper room was opened, and the seventeen were marshalled by a herald-at-arms and two hundred domestics to a meal of fourteen courses. Hundreds of persons, admitted by separate invitation, contemplated the proceedings from the gallery. One course consisted solely of pork in various forms, and the host assured his guests that it was specially furnished by a pork butcher, his father's cousin-german. American legislators may applaud the fact that no drinks were permitted except tea, coffee, or chocolate ; others will think that Grimod de la Reynière understood the art of self-advertisement better than that of dining, and was a great deal more queer than hospitable. At others of his entertainments there was an obligation on everybody to drink at least seventeen cups of coffee, and one needy poet, brought in to declaim his verses, was overcome by thirst, and clamoured for a glass of Bordeaux, only to be rated furiously by his host.

• Grimod's conversion to a more judicious taste in dining had an odd origin. He was quarrelsome and an unbridled lampooner, and he was shut up by *lettre de cachet*, his family entirely consenting, if, indeed, they did not solicit the order. The place of his internment was a monastery near Nancy, and the good monks heaped attentions on their inmate. If the most persuasive of these attentions were not addressed to his palate, the monks of Merinville must have been very unlike other religious in the France of that date. None the less, Grimod was very anxious to get out, and expressed his willingness even to accept the post of magistrate which he had refused before (saying that if he were a judge he might have to hang his father, but that by going to the Bar he could defend him without scruple of conscience).

His exile ended in 1789. He had been a valiant Jacobin, and insulted persons of nobility openly in his father's house, but now he wanted to make a bonfire of those who upset the charming old order. "I should die of grief, if it were not for the good appetite that saves me," he writes. He was not alone in finding this consolation : Mercier, who had been in six prisons, says that in all of them the best that could be bought was sent for, regardless of cost. Good food and good wine helped, he says, to overcome weariness, bad air,

In Praise of France

and solitude, and, he adds, “gave me courage to wait for justice to come.”

La Reynière the elder did not find the moral stimulus of food sufficient ; he died of fear, anticipating the guillotine, which swept off twenty-eight *fermiers-généraux* in a batch.

When Grimod got back to Paris in 1796, his first preoccupation was with the theatre and his organ the *Censeur Dramatique*. Then he fell in love with an actress, but she thought him too old—at thirty-nine ; and in a formal renunciation he fell out of love with love, and in love with gastronomy. He had reached the age : de Cussy, whom he thought the chief of all authorities, says that love of the table never becomes a passion before forty, or at least that no younger man is fully versed in it.

There was a club which dined together weekly at the Rocher du Cancale, and from it Grimod evolved his new conception of a *Jury Dégustatoire*, which should pass verdict upon whatever dishes were submitted to it, without knowing the name of the provider. Grimod himself became secretary, and recorded the proceedings with pedantic scrupulosity. Nothing could be taken more seriously. The jurors must not be more than twelve at a sitting ; five was the quorum ; both sexes were admitted. A member who having accepted an invitation failed to attend was fined fr. 500 (it is true, in paper money). One lady,

who excused her non-appearance by a plea of ill-health, and was seen that evening at the opera, suffered sentence of exclusion for three years. The only concession to the less robust sex was some modification of the rule that each juror should eat of every dish and drink of every wine submitted. To give authority to the verdicts, or *légitimations*, as they were called, an organ was essential, and in 1802 Grimod founded the *Almanach des Gourmands*. Such a work is necessarily without continuous plan, but the materials for history and philosophy abound in it, as well as witty sayings. The French Revolution was not merely political, he tells us, it changed our habits : we have come down from four meals (*déjeuner*, *dîner*, *goûter*, and *souper*) to two only. He adds that only dinner was important ; but literature elsewhere makes it plain that the midday meal was always *sérieux*. The real change lay in the abolition of a huge supper served about nine or ten. Louis XIV. dined at noon, and dined enormously. Earlier than that the rule of a virtuous life was given in rhyme—

“Up at six, dine at ten,
Sup at six, bed at ten,
Makes a man live ten times ten.”

In Grimod's day the practice of serving each dish separately was rare, and regarded as a refinement to concentrate attention on a special delicacy. Ordinarily, in the time of these classics, a

In Praise of France

course consisted of several dishes put on together ; fish, flesh, fowl, might all appear at once, to be replaced after an interval by what was really a second dinner. The dessert, or final course, comprised sweets, cheese, and fruit. “Gourmands,” says Grimod, “only eat the sweets out of politeness, but, as a rule, they are extremely polite.”

Here are some of his detached observations quoted or condensed :—

“ In the provinces, specially in the south, a fine dinner is an affair of state, discussed for three months beforehand. The digestion of it occupies six weeks.”

“ A fatal indigestion of grilled sturgeon was the commonest death for princes of the Church ; and how could a gourmand die better ? ”

Carp were extraordinarily sought after. A single monster might fetch up to thirty louis. One was sent from the Rhine, and went back to Strasbourg because nobody in Paris would pay its price ; it made the two journeys successfully, living on bread soaked in wine.

“ Pastry is to cookery what figures of rhetoric are to a set speech, its necessary ornament.”

“ A host must always have his eyes on plates and glasses. His nature should abhor a vacuum.”

“ While you can eat green peas in Paris, you have no right to count yourself unhappy.”

“ There was a Burgundian proverb : Better a



By Courtesy of Mr. Peter Davis

THE MEDITATIONS OF A GOURMAND

From the Frontispiece to the *Almanack des Gourmands*, 4^e année : Paris, 1806

The Classics of the Table

good dinner than a fine coat : it was so faithfully regarded that the people of Burgundy were said to have silk linings to their stomachs."

"The cellarer of a monastery of regulars said, 'There is more wine in the world than we need for masses, and not enough to turn the mills, so what should we do but drink it ?'"

And here, finally, is a passage which Professor Saintsbury surely knows by heart :—

"No man should renounce the duty of forming a good cellar. It may cost him thirty years of care, expense, and journeyings, and demand almost superhuman vigilance and activity : but what delights he is preparing for himself, and what an inheritance for the son who perpetuates his name!"

On occasion this wit could be admirably impertinent. Once, when he was brought to book on a charge of *lèse-majesté*, he wrote this apology to Napoleon's official :—

"Nobody admires our great Emperor more than I do. But I may be permitted to deplore the use he makes of his talent. My lord, had he applied himself to the advancement of cookery, who can tell what point of perfection we might not have attained ?"

But when dealing with ordinary people, no apologies tempered Grimod's insolence. Here is how the *Almanach des Gourmands*, exercising what Grimod called *la police gourmande*, expressed its

In Praise of France

disapproval of a certain fruiterer's shop in les Halles :—

“ It is not because the widow Fontaine, formerly Marie de Livernois, is a bad woman, whose first husband died of vexation, and whose second hung himself in despair, that we point her out as a rock in the fairway : but simply because fraud and cunning seem to be her native element, and her daughter and her son march faithfully in her footsteps.”

One is not surprised to learn that the costs of a libel action occasioned the *Almanach*'s disappearance after its eighth volume. Its author maintained his notoriety by new freaks, and the best known is the wittiest. At a given date all his friends received a card *de faire part*, in which Madame Grimod de la Reynière announced the melancholy news of her husband's death and fixed the hour of assemblage for the funeral procession in the late afternoon—just before dinner-time. Only a small number of the invited made the necessary sacrifice. They found the hearse in the court-yard, the bier in gloomy state, and during a prolonged waiting in a hall draped with black, they discussed the virtues of the departed, when suddenly the folding doors swung open, disclosing a brilliantly lighted dinner-table, at the head of which sat gravely Grimod de la Reynière. “ Gentlemen, dinner will be growing cold—pray take

your places," he said, and so they fell to. "That night," he observes, "I can be sure that I dined with friends."

One of his eccentricities was to allow no looking-glass of any sort in the dining-room. In this the Marquis de Cussy, whom he called "the most illustrious gastronomer of *l'Europe gourmande*," upheld him. "It is only before meals," said de Cussy, "that one should study oneself in the mirror."

All that is left us of de Cussy's wisdom goes into fifty pages, and they, as he said himself, are merely notes—talk, rather than writing; no subject is treated exhaustively. But no other of these classics contrives to convey such an impression of authority. The grand seigneur keeps all his prestige when he pontificates on matters of the table.

According to the usage of that time, de Cussy begins with a display of classical learning. "Rome," he says, "outdid Athens. The Romans ate skilfully and superbly, and they talked as well as the Greeks. It is easy to understand the charm which these harsh masters of the world, soured by ambition, overspurred by the difficulties of their vast enterprises, and made callous by long manipulation of men, could find in gatherings where public life with its violent clamour and annoyances sank out of consciousness, and delight of the palate and of every sense gave an artificial return of

In Praise of France

youth's sensations. The table was the place where they could rest for a few moments, and evolve human philosophy out of their experience : it was at the table they could have enjoyment of their wealth, their wit, their beautiful women, their luxury, and by limiting their intimacy to this dazzling circle, could form a conception of the happiness it is in this world to be powerful, opulent, agreeable, and witty."

Was it only of the Romans that Napoleon's devoted adherent thought when he wrote this ? Passing to more modern times, in the grand siècle of France, according to de Cussy, the Court ate well and brilliantly, but gave too much attention to display. It was the rich bourgeois with the men of letters and the artists who learnt to eat and drink and laugh with the perfection of taste, till at the culmination of the *ancien régime* exquisite cookery inspired the wit of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, and the rest. "The hours spent in peaceable debate between men of the highest learning and accomplishment after a perfect dinner did more," says this gourmand, "to advance the human mind than all the lectures of all the academies."

A rich man's cook, he holds, is his real doctor. Carême cured George the Fourth of gout, and might have profoundly influenced the course of history, but that the French artist could not bear Brighton for more than a twelvemonth. Indeed,

de Cussy sees the influence of gastronomy everywhere, and accounts for the growth of Protestantism by the fact that a number of fasts and enforced abstinences were imposed by the Papacy : Martin Luther was the result. “ Spiritual power should be careful how it meddles with the kitchen.” On the other hand, political events may advance the science of good living. In 1397 Charles VI. and Wenceslas of Bohemia met at Rheims to discuss a treaty : they spent a month drinking champagne, which till then had only local repute ; thence-forward champagne and Bordeaux were “ the true uniting principles of French society.”

Lobsters are to de Cussy the index of spreading civilisation : no cultured society consents to do without them ; and he exults to think that in his day they were as readily to be had on the Danube as in Havre or London.

Here are some more generalised expressions of his philosophy :—

“ Coffee after a meal should always be served at table. In the drawing-room you are no longer in the dinner zone.”

“ Delicate food is the last ray of sunshine that falls caressingly upon the old.”

“ A mature man who has reached the age of gastronomy never leaves Paris willingly, and never leaves it for long. Country pleasures pall between forty and sixty, and whilst we stay in town we have

In Praise of France

at least the illusion of keeping in touch with the ideas which most concern us."

"Poets sing of spring, but gourmands praise the autumn when the oyster and the partridge return."

This Parisian in his arrogance permits himself to say that the fine cookery does not exist in the provinces. The true master of gastronomy knew better. Brillat-Savarin belongs to France, not to Paris. He lived and worked thirty years in the metropolis, and died at his post, but his heart was with the places where his youth and early manhood were succulently nourished. He will praise Paris for its pastry, but when it is a question of something serious to eat, you find him going back to Bugey or Valromey, or the adjacent plain of Bresse, where the *poulardes* come from. Of this country he is the prophet, but not without honour there. Since he laid it down as an aphorism that "only men of wit know how to eat," Bugey, Valromey, and Bresse have been striving to establish their claim to be witty. On the other hand, it is clear that Paris never appreciated him. Grimod de la Reynière saluted the *Physiologie du Goût* as a masterpiece, and wondered why he had never known its author : de Cussy, more securely Parisian than Grimod, left on record his judgment that Brillat-Savarin ate badly, talked clumsily, and was sunk into himself at the end of a repast. Mon-

selet, a Parisian of later date, refused to accept this estimate. It means only, he says, that Brillat had his good and bad days like anyone else, and that de Cussy met him on a bad one. But you find de Cussy laying down that the accomplished gourmand should be able to talk and eat at the same time, "which," he says, "is not easy"; and you find Brillat-Savarin expressing his frank contempt of people who try to do two things at once. Clearly they represent different ideals, and we may just as well admit it. You can search the *Physiologie du Goût* from end to end without meeting any such shower of quick, stinging arrows as de Cussy and Grimod, born Parisians, let fly habitually. Everywhere Brillat's speech is leisurely. It reminds one of some witty, debonair old-fashioned country gentleman of the last century who had made the tour of Europe; but it is none the less good for that. Those who are in danger of regarding this masterpiece as a mere treatise on cookery may hear what Balzac has to say: "The *Physiologie du Goût*," he writes, "is plainly a work, slowly elaborated at chosen moments, a few touches at a time. The variety of subject comprised in the book's plan tells of a pen that was amused by its task, and felt itself justified in fantastic divagations. Time and long thought were needed before even a gastronomer of genius could perfect those convivial and social maxims which

In Praise of France

are the jewels that diaper the stuff of his treatise. Most of them were so happily phrased that they are accepted as proverbs by all lovers of the table, and provide multitudes of people with the substitute for wit of their own. Indeed, it is one of Brillat-Savarin's chief merits that he made the common herd read a book which is full of sound ideas and exact information, and thereby added to the small number of those truths that make up the popular instruction that is learnt neither from books nor from schools. What caused the book's success was the savour of its style ; no prose writer from the sixteenth century on, except La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld, has made a French sentence tell like Brillat-Savarin. But the essential characteristic of his work is a vein of satire underlying good-humour, and that is why he pleases better at the second reading."

Those who have the temperament which Balzac describes do not often write books. They are too happy, too fully occupied with savouring life as it passes by them. It needed the Revolution to make Brillat-Savarin an author, and even so it was a slow business. In youth he had done nothing but study for the provincial Bar, to which his family had belonged for several generations in Belley, an episcopal city of the old Duchy of Savoy. They owned land also. His father had been seigneur of Pugieu, a characteristic piece of Bugey. Swift,

The Classics of the Table

clear, little streams, steeply falling mountains, whose upper slopes are clad with oak-scrub and their lower slopes with vineyards ; rock everywhere and sunshine upon it : that is Brillat-Savarin's country. Till he was thirty-four he shot assiduously. Heath on the hills, marshes in the valleys, made it an ideal woodcock country. Snipe and duck were plenty in the bottoms, partridges and hares on the higher ground ; and higher up still, in the forests, roe and boar. Also in the autumn came smaller daintier birds, the quail, the rail, and, above all, the beccafico. Brillat-Savarin loved the company of those who shot the game, but not less that of those who appreciated it : elderly pre-Revolution clerics and competent old ladies with a gift for good cheer. He loved also the company of young ladies, we are given to understand, and he loved music ; he played the violin, he had a good voice, and cultivated it ; he was a person of general culture, and, like most persons of general culture, was, in those days before the Revolution, a Liberal. Then came the Revolution, good-tempered at first and civil ; the Three Estates met to frame a new constitution, and the people of Belley chose this popular young lawyer to represent them in the Tiers État. In the Constituent Assembly he took decidedly a Conservative line ; he was against the institution of juries, and also he was for keeping the death penalty, which the extremists wanted

In Praise of France

to abolish. Members of the Constituante were disqualified from sitting on the Convention, which came next, and Brillat, returning to Belley, was made mayor of the town. But things did not stand still, and the Mayor of Belley did not like the way they were moving. The extremists were in power now, and had completely got over their dislike to execution. Trying to save the lives and property of some Royalists, Brillat himself fell under suspicion, and in 1794 escape to Switzerland was his only chance. One of the many delightful stories in his book tells how he rode out to look for a safe conduct over the border, earned and enjoyed a festive dinner on the way with the shadow of the guillotine reaching out to overtake him, and finally sang himself into the good graces of the wife of the gentleman who could issue the passport. Then he went to America, where he played the fiddle in an orchestra, and could offer his fellow *émigrés* no better than a Welsh rabbit with ale or cider in a tavern ; except on one notable occasion when he shot a wild turkey (a day's ride from Boston), and brought it back to be the *pièce de résistance* of a glorious repast. However, he taught a tavern-keeper at Boston to make scrambled eggs with cheese, and so gained reputation. (Other *émigrés* employed similar talents much more profitably, and one earned a fortune by teaching London to dress salads.) In 1796 the

exile returned to France, was reinstated, got employment with the armies (on the commissariat side), and finally under the Consulate became a member of the Court of Appeal. To this post he clung through all changes with as much fidelity as the Vicar of Bray. It kept him in Paris ; but he still owned a shooting-lodge in his native country, and went there for two months every autumn. The house was kept for him by two old sisters, who stayed in bed all the time their brother was in Paris. Monselet says he left a widow, but Tendret, his compatriot, evidently never heard of her ; and if ever a book had a bachelor's atmosphere, it is the *Physiologie du Goût*.

Also, if ever a book was stamped with a man's character, this is it. In truth, though not formally a philosophy, it is a view of life in relation to the table. And not a superficial view. Some of the aphorisms are merely excellent counsels of courtesy. For instance :—

“ To wait too long for a belated guest is a want of consideration for all those who are present.”

“ The man who entertains his friends and gives no personal care to what is prepared for them does not deserve friends.”

But after these comes a counsel of perfection :—

“ When we invite a person, we make ourselves responsible for his happiness, for as long as he is under our roof.”

In Praise of France

He has also some charming observations on the duty of guests. If a host is bound to exert his talents for their pleasure, they are equally under obligation to recognise the effort. "Shame on the stupid eaters who gulp down refined dishes with a disgusting indifference. Any application of distinguished intelligence should receive explicit praise, and a delicate commendation is due wherever the desire to please makes itself known."

It is hardly necessary to point out that those who get drunk, or give themselves indigestion, are the very opposite of what he means by "gourmand." *Gourmandise*, he says, has no name in any language except French, and there was the same difficulty about *coquetterie*; it must be got over in the same way, by simply adopting the word. And he notes with pride as a "patriotic gastronomer," that both these fine modifications which social talent has imposed upon our most imperious cravings owe their origin to France.

One could hardly name a book more typical of the eminently social French mind. Refinement only began, in Brillat's opinion, when women were admitted to the banquet, as they were at Athens and at Rome; the dark ages banished them when the barbarians killed off all the cooks, and they did not resume their influence until Charlemagne's time; but then they retrieved the art of cookery from its lurking places—in the houses of religion.

He has copious detail about the introduction of various luxuries. How many realise that we had no turkeys till the reign of Louis XIV.? The Jesuits imported them, and bred them in one of their country establishments so successfully that in Brillat's day *un jésuite* was still a common name for the bird. But neither the Grand Siècle nor the period of Louis XV. knew the chief glory of the gourmand's table, the *dinde truffée*. Truffles were esteemed by the Romans; but their "resurrection" in France came only during Brillat's lifetime. About 1780 they were rare at Paris, and a truffled turkey could only be found "at the table of the greatest nobles or of the ladies of no reputation"; but after the Revolution truffles were, as they have been ever since, universally consumed and adored by gourmands.

Many ingredients go into the complicated dish which Brillat-Savarin bequeathed to literary epicures. It was the fashion of his day to be a little pedantic with the display of scientific attainments, and he takes passing toll of botany, zoology, chemistry, anatomy, medicine, hygiene, and political economy. There is a charming illustration in the chapter on fatness. Brillat, like every gourmand, realised that the passion which he cultivated had its dangers, and he tells us that for years he had to struggle with his abdomen. "I succeeded at last," he says, "in fixing it at the majestic."

In Praise of France

(Balzac, by the way, notes that his great stature made him "the drum-major of the Court of Appeal.") But Brillat would never for an instant have admitted that ladies must cease to be *gourmandes* if they wished to be beautiful. Beauty for him, as for his generation, was composed of pleasant roundnesses and gracious curves. He affirms with confidence that every thin woman desires to grow fat. "No cunning of the toilette, nor the most inspired dressmaker, can disguise certain deficiencies or spirit away certain angles." The dressmaker of to-day has to dissemble precisely those full curves which the Napoleonic heroes admired, and which a gift for gourmandise tends to develop ; and her clients cannot be so much at their ease with the truffled turkey while the fashion stays as it is. But Brillat-Savarin's chapter on fatness may still be worth study for those who wish to know what must be shunned if fat is to be avoided, and also what a noble range is still open to their appetite if they follow his advice.

There is something full-bodied, though never anything gross, about the leisurely discourse of this witty and good-natured Frenchman, and, like every other real humorist, he can suddenly touch you to grave issues. He tells a story of his aunt, who at the age of ninety-three was passing out of life with all her faculties in good order. Recognising him at her bedside, she said faintly, "Is

that you, nephew?" "Yes, aunt, and I think you would do well to drink a little good wine." He fetched her a glass of his best ; she drank it ; a touch of life came back to her, and then, he says, "She turned on me eyes that had been beautiful in her day, 'Thank you for this last kindness. If you ever come to my age, you will see that death becomes a craving, just like sleep.' These were her last words, and in half an hour she fell asleep for always."

If there is a touch of poetry in that, it is the only one you will find in this master of prose ; but his disciple, though a prose writer, gives us the idyllic poetry of cooking.

Lucien Tendret is perhaps scarcely well known enough to be called a classic. The sole edition of his book, *La Table au Pays de Brillat-Savarin*, was printed at Belley thirty years ago, and is unprocurable. Like Brillat, he was a lawyer, born at Belley, practising at Culoz, by the Lac du Bourget, but unlike Brillat he never strayed beyond his province. He was, it appears, an actual practitioner of cooking, and his book is full of enticing recipes, intricate as some old masterpiece of interlaced design. But it abounds in anecdote ; for instance the history of the nuns of Bons, a village between Belley and Pugieu, on the banks of the Furans. The conduct of these ladies gave occasion for scandal, especially their excessive devotion to

In Praise of France

the crayfish with which the Furans abounds. The Bishop of Belley came down to reprimand them, and the nuns replied that they took orders only from the Abbé de St. Sulpice. Three months later the bishop came back, only to find the gates barred against him. So by his orders a canon of the cathedral got a ladder, propped it against the convent wall, and from this eminence read a sentence of excommunication to the nuns—who crowded in the courtyard below, making, it is reported, “many indecorous gestures” to express their contempt. Richelieu was called in to interfere, and he ordered them to migrate to Belley and be under supervision. But they did not leave behind their treasures, chief of which was the recipe for cooking crayfish, transmitted to them by the prior of an adjoining monastery. The last abbess of Bons, when giving her orders to the lay sister in charge of the kitchen, used always to say, “Sister, you will prepare our crayfish according to the method of M. Le Prieur: may God grant him refreshment, and be merciful to us.” Tendret gives the recipe, which he calls “a brilliant composition in the major excitants.” Wine and meat-juice are the base of the liquid in which the cooking is done; brandy is added, then a handful of spices and mixed peppers.

But the sportsman in Tendret is even better than the anecdotist. His description of an old-

The Classics of the Table

fashioned French shooting party would fill a British gamekeeper with contempt and abhorrence, yet it has a gaiety that might beguile the most orthodox. Only, for the Frenchman there is no nonsense about not eating your own game ; the sportsman follows it to the kitchen, he observes it amorously on the spit before a fire, which must be of wood, for coal gases destroy a delicate bird's aroma ; and only certain woods should be used—oak, alder, and vine-stock. Then, passing to the description of the dinner, he characterises the perfect host, who has no need to be rich. Yet if simplicity is the note, every detail should be simple : “Simplicity served by taste is a luxury which millionaires cannot always command.” But the orderer of the feast must have a feeling for fine shades ; perfection lies in the finish of detail. In the dining-room there should be space, air, and light, and the temperature of a fine spring day ; carpets to warm your feet and deaden the noise of service : linen, spotless and odourless, dazzling white, yet not disagreeably stiffened. Quality comes far beyond profusion ; but the eye and the nostril should be courted as well as the palate. There can be no good dinner without a table wine that is clear, honest, and of pleasant flavour : buy it from a grower with a conscience like Montesquieu's, who was as careful of his vintage as of his literary compositions. It was Montesquieu who

In Praise of France

wrote to a friend when sending him a present of wine, " You can be sure that you are getting it as I received it of God's hands ; no merchant has touched it."

Anybody who has money can offer his guests succulent dishes and famous vintages, says this country-bred Frenchman, but courtesy and charm are not for money to buy. " To make those eat who lack appetite, to make the wit of the witty sparkle, to help the would-be witty to find some witty saying, these are the supreme achievements of the gastronomer as host."

To conclude the happy sportsman's dinner as he smokes the cigar of perfect peace, he recommends this prayer : " God, I thank Thee for having created game ; I pray Thee to preserve and deliver it from its destroyers. I have dined well, but I cannot give all the world a good dinner. Thou, who art all-powerful, in Thy infinite goodness take away appetite from those who have not the means to eat."

On the 1st of September, when shooting opens, Tendret used to ask his friends to dinner ; and when the bag had been brought home, and the birds transmuted into dishes, it was his custom to rise after the soup had been drunk, holding a glass of some old and amber-coloured wine (Virieu, or Manicle or Maretel, who shall say which is the best of those which grow on the slopes of Bugey ?),

The Classics of the Table

and call upon his friends to drink to the new season's sport and to the ripening grape.

On the 9th of September there was another festival : it was fair-day in the village of Vieu, near Brillat-Savarin's shooting-lodge, and in the old dining-room Brillat's grand-nephew, a country doctor, entertained all those who had known the great man. While his bust stood on the mantelpiece, they drank the wine from the vineyard that once was his, and they ate the *pâté*, shaped like a pillow, which was called in honour of his mother, " *l'oreiller de la Belle Aurore.*" You can find the recipe in Tendret. But it is much better to go and have it made for you by M. Pernolle, the great exponent of classic tradition in the birth-place of these classics : or, if Belley be too far, ask M. Prosper Montagné for it in Paris (at the Rue de l'Echelle), and in a few moments' talk you may find how much bonhomic, how much learning, and how much charm are still preserved by the highest exponents of this most French amongst the arts.

IX

IN POITOU AND PÉRIGORD

EVER since I first knew France, and that was when I left Oxford, I have been wanting to see a vintage. The chance came at last in 1926, and I began my pilgrimage at Poitiers, which at certain times was the capital of Aquitaine.

Old names have a magic, especially if they are fine names ; and what is finer than Aquitaine ? As for age, it is far older than France : when Rome was a Republic, Aquitaine meant the country from the Garonne to the Pyrenees ; Augustus settled that it should be extended from the mountain border to the Loire. In strictness, all this chapter and the next one should be called Vintage-time in Aquitaine. But Bordeaux, or the Bordelais, or, if you prefer it, Gascony, shall have a heading to itself.

In Poitiers, I arrived late, and set out next morning to explore, on a day of clear sunshine, golden, cool and delicious-like, the Vouvray in a little restaurant to which a Good Genius had conducted me in Paris.

The trouble about Poitiers is that there are too

many churches to see, and far too many historical associations. One tactfully avoided all enquiry after the battlefield, which lies some miles out to the north-west, and yet, what need to be tactful? Two-thirds of the victorious army were Gascons, fighting under the Black Prince, whose son and heir was born in Bordeaux. But everywhere familiar names come butting at you out of the past and insist on being recognised. Indeed, in the old castle of the Dukes, to which the modern law courts now form a façade, the guide and keeper, looking round the great stone-built hall (a lesser rival of Westminster's), said : *Vous êtes ici chez vous.* He was a merry and even a witty man, but he had a real sense of history. Poitiers was the special town of Eleanor of Aquitaine ; it was in Poitiers that she married Henry of Anjou and brought that amazing dowry to the future king of England. But this northern part of Aquitaine passed into French hands long before Bordeaux was lost. A French Parliament sat there when Joan of Arc stood to be examined before she could get leave to go to Orleans and try her hand at raising the siege. You can almost fix the flagstone she stood on.

The guide dwelt with unaffected delight on one feature of this building—the exquisite care by which light is distributed, and which makes that large chamber friendly and comfortable. “*Ils*

In Praise of France

étaient des malins " (cute lads), said he, showing how the cross lights were admitted and blended.

Crossing the Place d'Armes—probably in old days a fair green and assembly ground outside the walls—I came suddenly upon the massive little church of Saint Porchère, looking like a characteristic piece of Norman work. Then a narrow, winding street led out into an open space, and here was another church with the same heavy rounded arches, but entirely different from any Norman building. What accentuated its unlikeness was the number of little cupolas, shaped like pine cones, set on its pinnacles ; it was the strangest mixture of something familiar and something exotic. One began to realise that here it was once really a part of the later Roman world which Byzantium as well as Rome had made itself felt.

The cathedral, of which Henry II. and his Queen Eleanor began the building, is more normally Gothic. Its western façade with seven orders of sculpture shows in the upper rows a company of the elect, nicely dressed, promenading to Paradise, while below them the reprobate, stripped stark, are being shoved into hell—great rocks crushing them down. Very lovely bodies the sculptor had given to some of these poor outcasts. Poitou is one of the regions in France where the stone simply made sculptors. Everywhere the

chisel has been tempted to indulge a craftsman's fancy.

Inside were superb windows of thirteenth and fourteenth century glass : in some, great spaces had been opened to improve the lighting—as if you cut holes in an everlasting butterfly's wings. This outrage made me spiteful, and from the ambulatory I observed without charity a red and yellow thing like a closed umbrella set up by the altar ; a portrait of the same object hanging beside the door of the sacristy taught one to accept it as evidence of the fact that Pius X., at the request of the then Bishop of Poitiers, raised this cathedral to the dignity of a Minor Basilica. If this were, as I suspect, the bishop who cut holes in the stained glass, I would have degraded him to the level of one of the Huguenot iconoclasts ; lower, for they at least thought it their duty to break up beautiful things in churches.

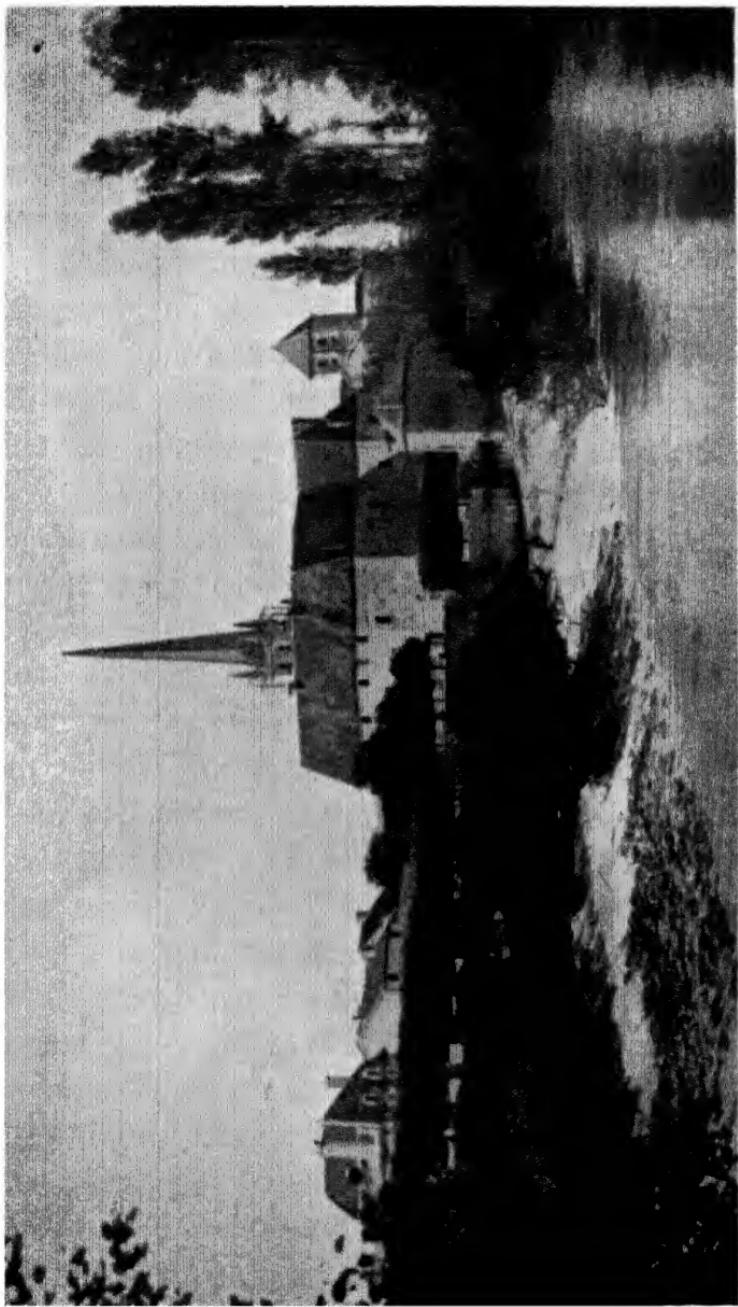
Hardly the length of a street from the cathedral one fell upon another church, built on a slope so steep that you descended to it by flights of steps. At the top of the parvis, by the balustrade, a group of white coifed old women pressed me to buy votive candles ; and so I knew that this must be the miracle-working St. Radegonde. Inside, a notice forbade persons to carry on this traffic within the parvis, and at the door was a great display of candles, sold presumably under the aus-

In Praise of France

pices of St. Radegonde herself. Plainly they are worth buying ; the walls are covered with tablets testifying to results. One thanked the saint for a *baccalaureat de philosophie* in 1909 ; another was “*Reconnaissance Examen 1914*” ; another, simply “*St. Cyr*” (as who should say ‘Woolwich’) “1900.” There were many thanks for “*heureuses fiançailles*, and I wondered which of the betrothed had publicly acknowledged this answer to prayer. Amongst all this complacent gratitude was one slab with the words : “*Merci quand même.*” Was that a lady who desired betrothal and missed it ?

Saint Radegonde herself, or what is left of her, reposes in a crypt ; the sarcophagus is covered with a penthouse roof, on which stand the wax candles and their drippings run into a gutter round it. No doubt the wax serves again. Beside the tomb is a fine statue of Anne of Austria, Mazarin’s queen, who spent much on this church.

As we came up out of the crypt people were coming to the altar rail and kneeling as a priest blessed them ; but through the open door swallows flew in and out, and the beat of their wings stirred up that rather overladen atmosphere of devotion. I liked St. Radegonde better from without ; its stone in the sunlight had a lovely brownness against the blue sky ; a little turret to the north side varied exquisitely the mass of the tower, and about the whole building clustered the brown and



Saint-Savin, au d'Initiative, Poitiers

SAINT SAVIN FROM THE GARTEMPE

purple roofs of ancient houses, all their lines softened and modified by the long pressure of the patient artist whom, for want of a better name, we call Time.

Next day, at the suggestion of a helpful lady in the Syndicat d'Initiative (these are institutions which no wise traveller neglects), was spent in a motor drive to see the mural paintings at Chauvigny and Saint Savin. The car ran down the steep street leading into the gorge of the Clain (which was Poitiers' defence round half the circle) and then slanted up the even steeper face opposite, where is shown the Rocher de Coligny, on which the Huguenot leader stood observing the effects of his artillery—at a range of perhaps five hundred yards. Then we came out on to the high lands, which in this country are seamed every few miles by river gorges like the two between which Poitiers is set. It was one of the days which Harpignies excels in rendering; the air so dry, so little mystery, or shadow in it, yet with grace everywhere, and that distinctive French charm of *clarté*; no overbearing sunshine, but a purging cleanliness of light.

All was very normal French country, with patches of vines—but as yet no sign of vintagers; and the vine here was plainly grown for home use, not for commerce; the business of that country is agriculture. I was puzzled by tracts of some tall

In Praise of France

yellow flowering growth till the driver explained that these were *topinambours*. With us, I think, the Jerusalem artichoke does not blossom, and certainly not like the perennial sunflower ; this may be a different variety ; it is grown for the oxen or for pig-food—though people use it themselves also a little. I had several conversations about it, for from Poitiers south it is largely grown, though from Tours northward scarcely at all ; and I found one man only who spoke of it with some relish as an article of food. And he ate his *sautés*, like potatoes.

Our road ran dead straight—very likely it was Roman—till at last a dip in the ground led into the valley of the Vienne, the great river which gives its name to the department. Across the bridge was Chauvigny, on a rocky spur ; but there must have been through all the centuries some kind of *ville basse* at the foot of its ascent. The road from the river-crossing skirted the place far below the fortified wall ; and here no doubt on the low ground were always taverns, and a forge. Here certainly was a church, for that little round arched building with pointed cap on its solid tower must be of the twelfth century at latest ; it stands delightfully in a tree-planted mall. But here, undoubtedly, also wayfarers paid toll ; the *ville haute* could be trusted to see to that. It contained no less than five feudal castles. The first you reach

as you climb was the castle of the Bishops of Poitiers, seigneurs of Chauvigny ; then come two others, one on each side of the street (what wars at close quarters there must have been in such a place between these fortresses !), and at the peak we reached the great church beyond which a tall square keep rose against the blue. The Church of St. Pierre presents to the street its apse and its clusters of lesser apse-shaped chapels ; all these roundnesses roughly compacted had a dignity that was a little uncouth ; but under that sun against that blueness, they had a startling beauty as if the church were something alive. The stone accounted for much ; Chauvigny has quarries of the finest in Poitou. In the church one saw what the mediæval craftsman could do with it, for the capitals all carved with coiling figures have been picked out in colour that gives them a strong relief. Very pagan they looked, reminding one of Hindu work : singular enlacements of dragons and men being devoured by dragons surround the Holy of Holies. But in mediæval times would the great columns of noble stone about the choir have been daubed with whorls of colour so as to resemble gigantic sugar-sticks ? Or is that one more evidence of the bad taste which the devout modern Catholic displays everywhere, and nowhere worse than in France ? The provinces are full of its vulgarities.

Walking round the church and back across the

In Praise of France

open space from which the donjon rises, one began to get the downhill view from that winding lane between high walls, from which trailing vines flung streamers ; and this narrow window framed lovely expanses of plain.

Then we went on again straight east, till presently a spire stuck up from the skyline, no taller than a telegraph pole ; only when we began to run down into the valley of the Gartempe did we see tower and spire as a whole, with the group of buildings which complete their beauty. Saint Savin was an abbey founded by Charlemagne, and the church is said to be the most perfect example of eleventh-century work in all France. Its celebrity as a place to visit seems to depend on the frescoes in the crypt, where the Poitevin artists have left for us realistic pictures of flogging and of breaking on the wheel, as these ceremonies were practised about the time of Henry and Eleanor. They have the same rough gusto that is in the sculpture of this country ; and it was Prosper Mérimée who made them famous. I should like to see his description. But for me the memory of Saint Savin is one of sheer enchanting beauty in which the church is only the central point. I stood and gazed up at the crocketed spire, 300 feet high, which builders of the fifteenth century had added to the Romanesque tower with perfect delicacy of adjustment ; then I made my way by

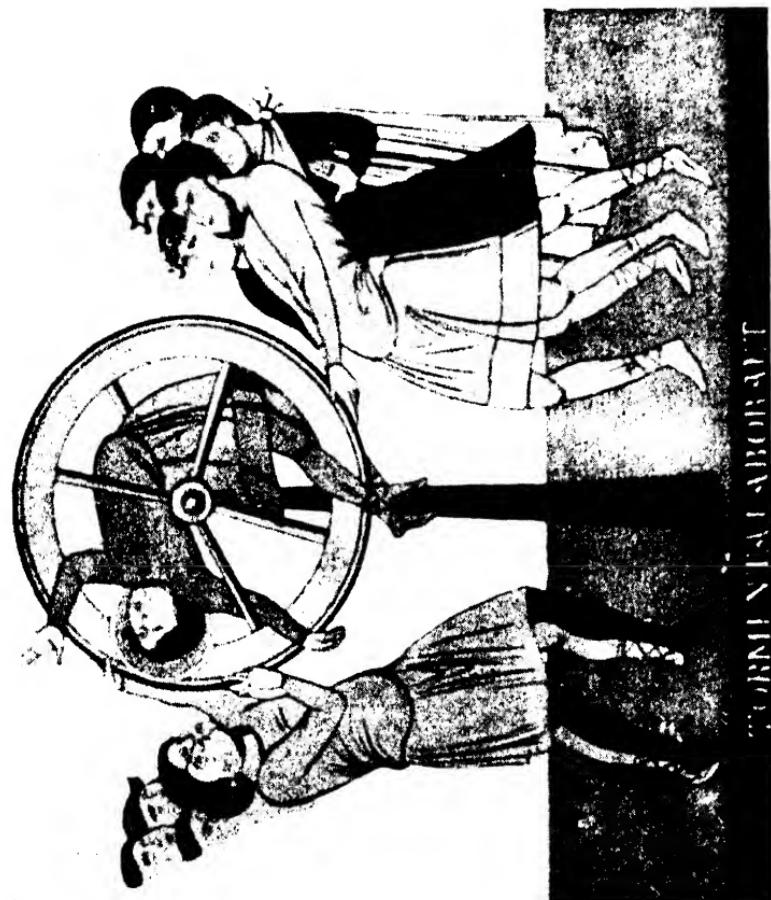
a narrow lane to look at the east end, and laughed with delight at the way in which those early builders had played with their work. It was as if one of them had cried out, “Look, there’s room here ; stick on another little chapel” ; and on it went, with its swelling roundnesses, and its strong solidity of growth, shouldering in to help to keep all standing till the crack of doom.

Then, since one could get no farther that way, I went back, and from the dark laneway saw the spire up against the sky, its stonework almost translucent, and through the balustrading sunlight pierced ; there never was so airy and sunny a structure. Moving round again by the west front to look at it, from the tree-planted square, an open door attracted me to the long range of buildings, once monastery, now a gendarmerie. I looked in, saw beautiful doorways of the seventeenth century, and a group of women sitting at work. With all the politeness I could muster, I approached, hat in hand, and asked for leave to throw a glance round. But the feminine gendarme is not affable, and a severe “*On ne visite pas*” was all I got ; so I literally threw my glance round and went along the wall to where this block of buildings ends up in what was a château of the fifteenth century. Here a fine piece of open iron-work gave full liberty to see ; and a lane round the end of it opened suddenly on to a river frontage

In Praise of France

where were women beating linen, beside the oldest and most entrancing millhouse on to which the château looked, with numberless eyes ; for its southward face here was pierced with more windows, big and little, than I ever saw in one wall of a house.

Along the beautiful river led a walk and a row of trees both ways—ever so far. I cursed my luck that I had not known about Saint Savin ; in all France I never saw a more tempting place to settle down for some days of loafing, and I wanted to explore away up along the river from the town, but had not time, and so followed the terrace between the abbey buildings and the river. Soon came an amazing sight—the arches of two bridges with no more than a few score yards between them. The first bridge gave the view of all that splendid group of masonry, which took perhaps six centuries to grow, and which, ever since the days of Cromwell's contemporaries, has been mellowing and ripening in the wind and sun. Then, turning downstream, I reached the other bridge, and no one was needed to say why there were two. Such a bridge : it wriggled its way across the water, and on the upstream side, it had roughly circular bays projecting, and on the downstream side, bays, square and diamond-shaped, again stuck on as a child might do, for pleasure, almost at random. Doubtless they served for



'Rédiction, Pontoise

MURAL PAINTING AT ST. SAVIN

traverses in defence ; but doubtless also they were very handy to dodge into if a loaded cart met you on the narrow track. I like to believe that it was Mérimée who insisted that nobody should attempt to modernise that ancient monument, but that a new bridge should be built near by.

The old bridge led into a narrow street full of quaint old houses, and there is a hotel where, undoubtedly, I should have stayed the night had the motor been my own ; but since it was a taxi accumulating francs, I tore myself from Saint Savin and drove back along the valley of the Gartempe, and then struck into the gorge of the Vienne where cliffs were steeper than ever ; at Angles, a ruined fortress crowned them most picturesquely, and the streets were full of mules and donkey-carts. I never saw more donkeys anywhere than in Poitou, not even in County Limerick ; and these were of a dark brown colour and very well cared for. Everywhere in the fields oxen were at the plough ; very few motors met us on the roads, but the farmers seemed to use plenty of machinery. Yet in one field, close to a very modern harrow, I saw a perfect example of the beehive hut built with dry stone—and, to all appearance, built not many years ago. It reminded me that in Inishmurray and suchlike homes of beehive architecture on the west coast of Ireland, antiquaries have been as much excited

In Praise of France

as Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck over some structure, though there were men in the parish who “ kenned the biggin’ o’ it.”

The end of our drive was through some five miles of dense forest, mostly oak, that comes close up to the outskirts of Poitiers. But by that time my eyes were too tired with varying beauty and interest to take note of much.

The next stage was to be Périgord ; that meant leaving the basin of the Loire (into which the Clain falls, as part of the Vienne) and crossing another entire system of rivers, before one reached those waters which pass out by the quays of Bordeaux. In case any reader of this shares my passion for making out a map, I shall say that we ran south, following the valley of the Clain upstream, but then, somewhere about Ruffec, sighted a new river, flowing south instead of north. This was the Charente, and it ran beside us to Angoulême. There it turns at a right angle and flows west to Cognac—having on its southern bank all the classic sources of brandy. A tunnel took us right under the hill on which Angoulême stands, and from the southern slope of this water began to trickle towards the Dronne, which came in, a heavy stream, from our left at Montguyon. We changed at Coutras, close to where a still larger river, the Isle, makes a junction with the Dronne, and together Dronne and Isle flow south

into the Dordogne at Fronsac—which was in history one of the outposts of the Bordelais.

My way, however, turned off east at Coutras, and followed (against the stream) the broad valley of the Isle, through level fields where vines were by far more carefully tended and marshalled than in Poitou. Presently the valley contracted, there were round smooth hills on each flank, and then the ancient city of Périgueux showed itself above us.

The Hôtel de Périgord is in the very centre of things, on the Cours Michel Montaigne, and its cuisine was highly praised in the little volume of *La France Gastronomique*, which naturally accompanied me. But it is well to get wider contact at once with a town, and two restaurants were commended which had attractive names. I went into a tobacconist's and in the process of buying some cigarettes asked my way to the *Lancier Polonais*. The tobacconist's face grew clouded. It was an old place, he said, and had once been good. What about the *Tour Mataguerre*, I asked. His face cleared at once. “Ah, *celui-là, je vous le conseille*,” said he; and so off I went down the wide boulevard with its four rows of trees until at last the square block of a tower loomed up, and in the street behind it—an old and narrow street—was the restaurant. One ate there for ten francs with wine thrown in, among the shopkeepers of

In Praise of France

Périgueux, and ate well. If I had nothing else to praise Périgord for, I should praise it for cheapness. All the same, it seemed appropriate to eat at least once quite a different kind of meal in this region, which is among the classic homes of French cookery ; so the chef got a free hand next day for *déjeuner*. What he chose to offer was partridge (and it was *perdreau* not *perdrix*, young and succulent) ; but he preceded it by a pike, the kind of pike which people throw away in Ireland—not more than a foot long. Yet, how good a dish that cook in Périgord made of it ! This enchanting meal was honoured by an exquisite wine, Sainte Croix du Mont, which called itself a Sauternes. I could not make out why it lacked the rather fulsome sweetness of ordinary Sauternes, but know now that it is grown on the north bank of the Gironde, which is the wrong one—except for those who like their wines dry. It was of a famous year, 1911. But even more memorable than the pike or the partridge or the wine were the peaches which completed that repast ; their skin was dark in colour, and, when opened, disclosed a dark red flesh, differing from the ordinary peach in flavour as red wine from white. I saw such peaches again once in a market, and did not buy them ; that is the haunting regret of my tour ; thereafter, none were to be had, they were the last glory of the peaches' year. After them came

In Poitou and Périgord

only the hard things which are used for preserving and which have only the delusive semblance of a peach with a faint suggestion of its perfume.

In Périgueux, every form of guidance prompts a visitor to the cathedral, and I struck in from the boulevard by the narrowest imaginable little streets, into a market-place below St. Front's western façade. Beyond it rose up the huge edifice, with Roman arches, but crowned with so many cupolas that it looked wholly unlike any church I have ever seen in France.

The whole place was full of colour ; baskets of monstrous solid tomatoes ; pumpkins with slices cut into them, showing the red inward against the golden rind ; hampers of field-grown grapes, green clusters and red mixed together with cobweb bloom over them ; and among the booths, crowds of women all in black—and for a background this strange great building, white in the sun. All the pinnacles had the cone-shaped tops which I saw first at Poitiers ; but here the cone was capped with something like a flame. I moved out of the crowd to a terrace from which one could see better. All about the market were houses with rough tiled roofs, normal France ; but this queer exotic building made one realise how many races had fused here ; the Gaul, the Roman, the Norman in his day—the Englishman too, though

In Praise of France

he left little mark on Périgueux which, unlike Bordeaux, always fought to keep him out.

Seen from here, the stone of the building was whitish grey like a dry seashell, with tones of yellow and pink coming out under sunshine, and all falling into grey at the least hint of a cloud. Among the terrace trees, an elderly workman was busy on stone for repairs ; chalky white—but, when wrought, it takes a patine in the air very quickly. I asked him if he could say at what times parts of the building had been made. Pointing to a cupola : “ I worked on that one myself,” he said. Pressed for more information, he left me vaguely under the impression that he had built the whole ; it is anyhow, as it stands, quite modern ; photographs of fifty years back show a very different cathedral—and perhaps a more beautiful one. But if you do not like St. Front, there is plenty else to see in Périgueux. Even the view from this terrace over the breast-shaped hills that engirdle the town is a thing to remember.

Guide-books spoke of a great antiquity, the Roman arena, and my search brought me to the *Tour de Vésone*, where was once the temple of Vesona, tutelary goddess of the Gallo-Roman town. As for the arena, the circle of it is marked by what Périgueux calls “ *le Square* ” : under the shattered masses of the amphitheatre round arches showed,

and while I was wondering if lions used to come out of them, a notice caught the eye. It advertised the station of a Périgourdin Society of Bee-keeping ; and there, sure enough, were a few hives perched on the ruined wall—as if the bees had come out of the ghosts of dead lions, by a variant of Samson's story. Then I gave up my guide-book, picked my way to the river, and came back along it to the mediæval town. A broad river it is, and boats lying off the quay carried mast and sail. The quay was imposing, backed by a great levée between two bridges. Towards the farther bridge, houses grew more and more archaic ; one was strutted out on old props of timber in a way that seemed incomprehensible. Then just beyond the bridge were two, classed as *monuments historiques*. The principal one had five tall mullioned windows for dormers in its roof : below these were apartments of great height giving on to a stone balcony, protected overhead by the far projecting eaves. The whole proportions were puzzling till, as I stood and stared, a woman leant from the window and told me that this had been the house of the Seigneurs of Périgord, and that the doors of its lower story gave on to the water. Then, the whole became clear ; the levée was a modern construction, and the ground in front of these houses, when they were built, had been 10 or 12 feet lower ; the house strutted out

In Praise of France

had been an old mill ; and a weir must have dammed the river where the bridge is now.

One could not find fault with the changes : that long wide quay with the big sailing boat and piled timber had extraordinary dignity as the evening mist rose from the river ; and it was a pleasant town where people accosted strangers and told them what they wanted to know. As I made my way in the falling dusk past the cathedral and up-hill through narrow streets, old gateways tempted me to stop again and again, and presently a gentleman came up and offered to show me over one of these dwellings next morning.

Punctually I rang at the solemn gateway, and under the arch entered the court of what was once the Mint—*Hôtel de la Monnaye*. My cicerone was a business man, installed in such a chamber as one might match only in Oxford ; the stone roof had groinings worthy of anything in Christ Church ; and its proprietor had fitting pride in his possession, though it had not hindered him from furnishing it with the ugliest modern articles of convenience. He took me to the terrace overlooking the Isle : the old town defences ran just below. Other houses of the same period were in that street—but he advised me to make my way to the Rue de la Sagesse and find a grocer's shop there. Picking my way through the tangle of narrow streets, I stopped in

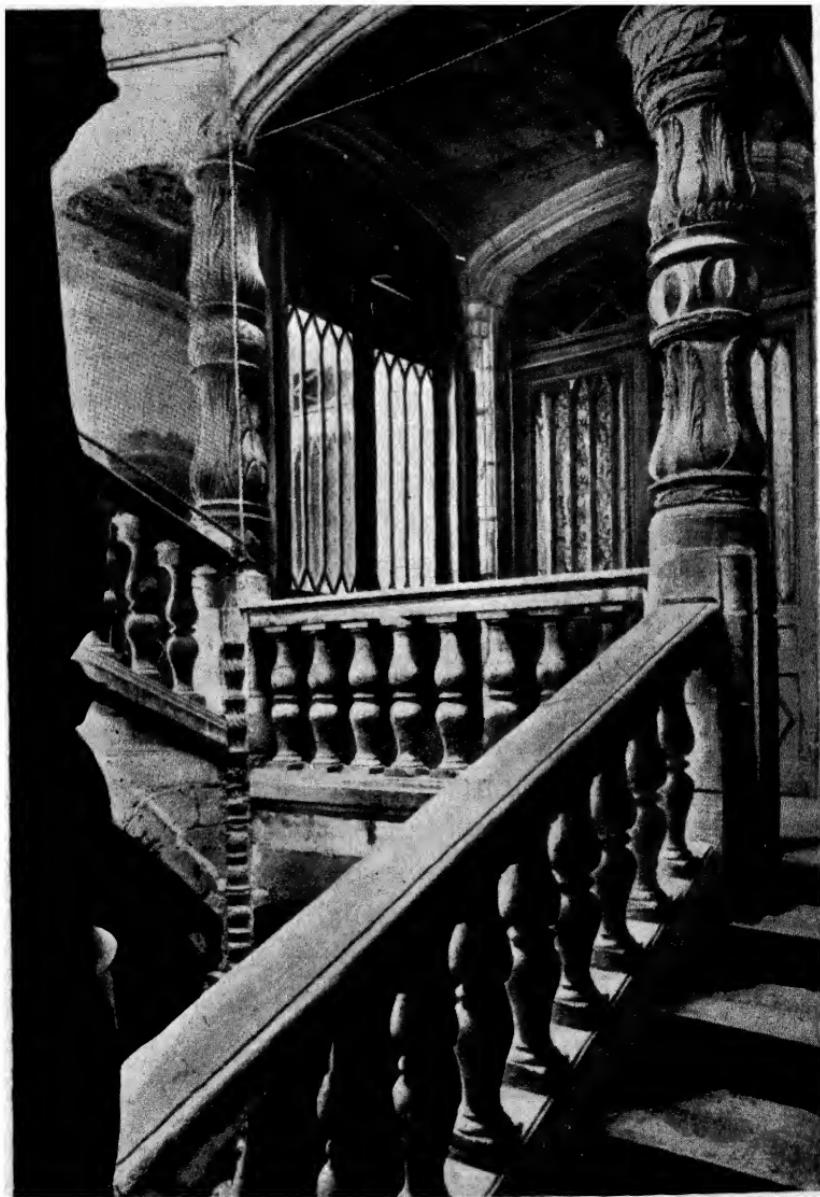
one before the superb decorated front of a Renaissance mansion. Then from a butcher's shop issued a good lady who told me I ought to go inside ; and when I seemed shy, she sent her shop-boy for escort. Here was a staircase fit for a palace ; spiral, mounting through a square well and propped on decorated columns ; its stone balusters nobly wrought ; the whole expressing the last degree of dignity and opulence. It was a *monument historique* ; the owner (a Bordeaux lawyer) could not sell it to Americans, even if he would, nor interfere with its beauty in any way. When I expressed some of my thanks to the kind lady, she said there was another stair as fine in the next street, and again her boy escorted me ; this time the place was a common tenement house. This staircase was in squared flights, if anything more majestic than the other. And the butcher's boy courteously declined to receive any remuneration. Périgueux afforded the extreme examples of that perfect politeness and desire to be of service which we met everywhere through South-Western France.

There was still the Rue de la Sagesse to find, and I found it, and a grocer's shop at the upper end, where it comes out on the Allées de Tourny. The young woman of the shop said she had no staircase to show, but a very fine *entrée de porte* ; and we dodged round a back entry to where the

In Praise of France

fine stone doorway with its classic overlintel had once led from a courtyard into the house of some wealthy citizen. Then, on reflection, she said I must be looking for a shop at the other end of the street ; and so out she stepped, her smooth black hair shining, her lips perhaps a little redder than God made them, a touch of powder over the oval of her face, but if she had taken pains about her looks they were well worth it ; and as she was saying that there were *de belles choses anciennes* in Périgueux, one could not help answering that there were also charming objects not at all ancient. She did not resent the personal remark, and introduced me pleasantly to the other grocer's shop, whose very inconspicuous sign we had passed in that sombre gorge of a street. This staircase also was notable. But what one valued more than staircases was the goodwill of the Périgueux to strangers, and their manifest pride in the beauties of their town.

These streets lie above the cathedral ; below it towards the river is another labyrinth of them also, with queer old names : Rue du Repos, Rue de la Vertu, and (perhaps the most beautiful mediæval street in Périgord, so varied in the line of its buildings), Rue du Lys, facing a convent wall. I am glad that the Périgueux do not give too much rein to France's instinct for commemorating notables. However, at the end of the Rue du Lys one



Domège, Périgueux

STONE STAIRCASE AT PÉRIGUEUX

emerges into sunlight on the Place Hoche—a fine name that, anyway ; and then, passing up by the Tour Mataguerre and the line of the old defences I came to the Cours Michel Montaigne. Montaigne's statue is there—a good piece of work, having a suggestion of gentle meditation. But when I went round the four bookshops of the town (one of these being the Librairie Montaigne) to get a copy of the *Essais*, not one of them had it. Still, they all declared that this was a mere coincidence.

I do not think, however, that by any accident you would ever find Périgueux unprovided with truffles. Montaigne is one of its glories ; but the truffle is to Périgord what claret is to Bordeaux.

One heard much about this luxury at Brantôme, twenty miles north. The autobus thither passes at Château l'Evêque one of the most adorable mansions eye ever saw. It belongs to Madame Jenny, no small name among Parisian dressmakers, I understand ; and she keeps it as it should be kept.

But about the truffles. They are harvested in November ; pigs dig them out from under oak trees, the pig being specially trained ; a pig of talent fetches large money. The animal is provided with a wire muzzle to assist in his digging, and also to prevent him from eating the tuber when he gets it. It is about as big as a potato ;

In Praise of France

some will weigh nearly a pound, and, consequently, be worth about forty francs. The pig, when he finds, has to put up with a handful of maize for encouragement.

The chief hotel is so famous for its cookery that it has crowds of folk all summer ; but I did not fall in love with it, nor with its cookery, though the lady of the house came round during each meal to find out how one liked the *omelette aux truffes* or the *confit d'oie*—a preparation of preserved goose meat, which is very excellent. Nor did I feel that I ever wanted to drink another bottle of Montbazillac, which is the famous growth of Périgord—strong and sweet, with an odd subflavour of sourness.

But except the hotel, there was little in Brantôme I did not fall in love with. The town lies in the valley of the Dronne, and to the north there is a steep high cliff ; but the valley is wide and level, and the river has been artificially split into two, so that the main body of it comes round under the cliff, but part falls over a weir and encircles Brantôme on the other side, making an island of some few acres which the town fills, but does not crowd. From the bridge a beautiful great Mall stretches up to the weir, and at the end is the Hôpital, a building of the Grand Siècle ; downstream, a street brings you to another open space by the water where the market is held.

(Figs there cost twelve a penny, and they were the figs of paradise ; cool, fresh and luscious, the bloom still on them.) On wet days the market is held in an old parish church, secularised since the Revolution ; but Brantôme still has plenty of places to say its prayers. The old abbey buildings across the river under the cliffs have been secularised too for schools and townhall ; but their church still keeps its old uses.

This is the abbey of which Pierre de Brantôme was abbot—deriving from this preferment most of his revenues. He was a soldier of fortune and courtier in the times when the Reformation set war raging ; he thought he ought to have been made seneschal of Périgord, and when he was not appointed, threw his gold pass-key of the king's apartments into the Seine and came back to Brantôme to spend the last part of his life in writing the memoirs, which have so much edified posterity.

A few things may be of interest to those who like this old gentleman. First, the sacrifice of his key was probably only rhetorical ; at all events, a gold key with silver lanyard was found among his papers. Secondly, the memoirs which he wrote between 1590 and his death in 1614 were bequeathed to his nephews and nieces (for he never married) in nine manuscript volumes, velvet bound ; but they were not printed after his death,

In Praise of France

as he directed, “in large and beautiful characters to have the better appearance.” Nephews and nieces left it for a stranger, fifty years later, to give the world Brantôme’s stories of gallantry. Thirdly, the chronicler, although he took his title from the abbey to which he was preferred, was by birth named after a place if possible even more fascinating than Brantôme. The street past the abbey, along which the local steam tram runs, is called Avenue Pierre de Bourdeille—and it will take you to Bourdeille. But it is better to go by the road which follows the valley of the Dronne, first passing a line of cellars and dwellings tunnelled into the cliff. You will notice that over the doorways of these cave-dwellers the rock is all blackened. At Vouvray, on the Loire, they manage better and contrive chimneys, but here evidently the smoke comes out by the entrance. Farther on, the road is carried right under projections of rock, not hewn back but rounded off (apparently by water in remote ages), so that the rocks spread out from their base like great mushrooms ; and when you get to Bourdeille and enter the enceinte of the feudal castle which stands high above the river, cliffs so water-worn are below ; the owners of the château have contrived a walk round the face of them, sheltered from above by the stone mushrooms.

It certainly was a more than commonly beautiful day ; but in my review of that autumn’s wan-

derings, Bourdeille stands out as the loveliest thing I saw. The old castle is very complete. I climbed to the top of the tower, and the view over that fertile valley rewards one ; below the battlements is a very old mill, built boatshaped, with water on both sides of it—part of the defence. But the object of chief interest is a Renaissance château, built by Brantôme's sister-in-law in haste, for the reception of Catherine de Medicis—who after all never came. This unfortified habitation, set there in the middle of a fortress, testified to one thing—a strong feeling for landscape beauty in or about the year 1570. The windows of the great salon are so set as to command the enchanting view up the valley of the Dronne, which flowed that day like a streak of silver.

They say that Brantôme lived here and wrote here much ; and when I had passed the château and come out on the terrace, a bust at the end of it was, I thought, surely his memorial. However, it proved to be some whiskered Maire, or other notable, of the Commune. Why should he be commemorated on that lovely level, planted with acacias, high above the river—dizzily high—looking at the seignorial group of buildings ?

On the whole, if I had been Brantôme I would rather have lived and written there, perched upon the high rock at Bourdeille, than in Brantôme, with its abbey at the water level. Yet what a little jewel

In Praise of France

of a town it is ; all encompassed with a shining, sliding river, and the river crossed by a beautiful old *Pont Coudé* (bridge with an elbow) where the two streams meet—and wherever an open space fronts the water, the whole is closed in with a stone balustrade : so that lovely huddle of red roofs is all framed with a double border, liquid silver water and dove-grey stone.

Of course at times it would be all different ; what one remembers from this year is the thin film of water sliding over green weed ; beyond it, slender poplars and other light foliage half screening houses, the whole taking life and motion from the barred sunlight and the ripple of a dainty upstream breeze.

But seldom can that river be so low as in that September. I scrambled up the steep bank behind the abbey—very steep, through copse—and came out upon vineyards, the first I had seen close ; and very few indeed were the grapes. Up there where the soil is so light and on the pathways between the plots heather and gorse and broom broke out, the scarcity was hardly surprising ; the wonder to a northerner was that vines should grow at all in such company. It was a lovely outlook, the stubble fields all dotted with walnut trees, the white roads far below curving out through the rolling hills, and the valleys full of spikes of Lombardy poplar. But a farmer man passed, and I fell into talk about

a field of maize, which seemed to have no yield worth speaking of. Certainly, he said, it should have been all in, and the birds had destroyed what grain was left ; but it was a year of misery ; no rain since June, no growth anywhere, and the first shoots of the vine had been nipped by a frost, and those who cut them back would have no grapes this year, and those who did not would have nothing for two or three years. As for the walnuts, which in an ordinary year were worth a million francs to the commune of Brantôme, each house would hardly have what it could use. And the young people would not stay by the land ; off with them all to the town. Did they send anything back ? Not they ; no, but they were always asking for a bag of potatoes or a few haricots which the farm would never miss. “ For my own part,” said he, “ I told them, ‘ If you leave the farm you need never set foot here again.’ ”

It is the small farmer’s refrain over all Europe, and this man, handsome and kindly with pleasant eyes, did not look like one to harden his heart ; but he did fiercely accuse the new generation of disloyalty to the land. And it was a pitiful thing to know that the sunshine which had brought me, and so many thousands like me, so much delight in this summer and autumn, had been a curse to such decent folk.

At all events I got from him the first definite

In Praise of France

knowledge that the vintage which I was going to see must be a poor one ; perhaps the least hopeful since 1914. But since 1914, it is only fair to say that all years except 1922 have been above the average, and two or three even memorable.

From Brantôme, through Périgueux, I returned to Coutras, and from there to Libourne, vineyards dominated the landscape ; and now one saw here and there ox-carts drawing great tubs among the vines. At Libourne, the line crosses the Dordogne, flowing west, and then runs across some fifteen miles of uninteresting plain before the cranes and ships and buildings of Bordeaux come into view, and a long bridge spans the Garonne.

X

VINTAGE TIME IN BORDEAUX

AT all times the port of Bordeaux and the country from which it draws its exquisite cargoes have been part of Aquitaine. Wine was grown there long before the Roman conquest ; these people learnt the culture from the Greeks of Marseilles who came among them trading. Since the introduction of the grape to Burgundy only came under Roman rule, it is safe to say that Aquitaine yielded the first perfect wine ever vouchsafed to man. One may prefer Burgundy, champagne or port ; but no wine lover will deny that the best vintages of Bordeaux are in their own kind perfection ; and for my own part, if I had to choose a wine to live and die with, it would come from Médoc.

Horace and Virgil unhappily knew nothing about these treasures ; but in the full vigour of the Roman Empire Ausonius celebrated them in verse—as piety constrained him to do, for he was a Gaul of Aquitaine ; and his native land has not forgotten, but pays him appropriate honour. In the St. Emilion district there is one little estate,

In Praise of France

producing only a small quantity in the best years ; the great wine-shippers do not quote it for export, thinking that its supply can be fully dealt with at home—where it fetches a higher price than even Lafitt or Margaux. The name given to this rare and choice product is Château Ausone. What poet is more happily commemorated ?

If the historian of Bordeaux speaks truth, we of the overseas who cannot grow wine for ourselves owe a debt past counting to the Bordelais ; for although the Greeks brought the craft of wine making into Aquitaine, the people of that country themselves, with their superb river port, invented the stout wine casks to replace the brittle amphora. And so seafaring men carried the purple or golden liquor safely, to delight unvintageable lands.

Twilight was falling and lamps were lit as I entered Bordeaux, and as we drove more than a mile along the quays it seemed to me that I had never seen a town so uniform in style ; at the centre, where the magnificent bridge of seventeen arches makes a monument to the First Empire, the buildings were not only harmonious but magnificent. Here, as everywhere, the French have planned the town so that it should look nobly on to its port, and that its port should combine to give movement and beauty to the whole.

Since I had arrived on a Saturday night, my letters of introduction must wait till Monday ;

but plainly there were things to be seen at St. Emilion. So on Sunday I walked out to the Cours de l'Intendance, and followed this main street, which leads straight downhill at right angles to the river till one reaches the Place Richelieu—only divided from the Place de la Bourse by the noble building which is the Bourse itself, built in 1740. If possible, the town looked finer by full day than in the half light. A ferry boat took me across to La Bastide, and our train skirted the river past long lines of scarcely utilised quays—built when American engineers fitted out this port to receive their millions of men. Farther along, one saw at some distance the two immense bridges which span the Dordogne at Cubzac—for we were crossing again the triangle of flat land called Entre-deux-Mers, which is enclosed between the tide-ways of Dordogne and Garonne before they meet and become the Gironde. Presently I was back at Libourne ; and here the train was stormed by a crowd of rough looking men and women—vintage workers, like English hoppers, starting off for their job. They scattered at once whatever illusions I cherished about the idyllic beauty of grape-gatherers.

Our line now followed up the north bank of the Dordogne, and here were steep hill slopes. St. Emilion was the second station, but an autobus driver explained that we were two kilometres from

In Praise of France

the town ; so in I got and began enquiring my way to a hostelry named in the guide-book. A very big man with pleasant blue eyes proffered counsel. The hotel I spoke of had, he said, a mitrailleuse ambuscaded behind the door ; it kept up a terrible fire on purses ; I should be much better at another little restaurant—towards which he escorted me. It was a dark little room, with sunblinds down, but friendly and intimate ; an excellent meal was brought and I was very proud of the travellers' knack for happening lucky. I drank what was described as the “ grand ordinaire ”—and for the first time in my life realised what St. Emilion ought to be. This wine was really more like a Burgundy—indeed they call it the Bourgogne du Bordelais. There was no date on the bottle, but it was very old, and it cost roughly one shilling and a halfpenny. In such moments one can think of money joyfully, without any mean gloating over the exchange, but because of sheer delight in the purchasing power—as if some pleasant magic had made our earnings exchangeable for rare treasure. And that goes with a sense of gratitude and affection to the country where it is so easy for everyone to attain a sense of well-being—no matter how the franc stands. In England on a similar outing you will only at a cost get the feeling of being well done—with the risk of feeling done instead.

After these pious reflections I paid the modest bill and strolled out to the square where a tower stood looking down from a height over the old town. After studying the topography of St. Emilion—which is a horseshoe-shaped amphitheatre facing south, in a fold of the *coteau*, I noticed the hostelry against which I was warned. It opened also on to the square, and outside was posted the menu. It cost exactly one franc more than ours, and it included *confit d'oie*, which I would gladly have tasted again ; but it also included lampreys which I had never eaten and always wanted to taste. There was a touch of sadness on me as I made my way down to the centre of attraction for tourists—St. Emilion's cell, and the *église monolithe*.

French trippers were pervading the place and showing that they could be at least as noisy and obnoxious as any others of their kind ; and it was a pity, for those monuments are worth study in quiet. The saint—a Breton monk—lived in the eighth century, and probably disciples accompanied him or joined him when he set up his rest where a spring flowed from the living rock. In the cave which he made his dwelling-place and oratory (scooping out that easily wrought stone) there is a never-failing well, which, according to the guide, gives a supply to all the present town. (One could not but reflect that St. Emilion must

In Praise of France

supplement it with a deal of wine.) The well in the grotto itself now serves one main purpose : to know if you are going to be married, you drop in two pins : if they cross each other at the bottom, marriage follows. The well was paved with pins.

There are plenty of other examples of prosperous communities that have sprung up round the germinal cell of some Celtic hermitage—St. Gall in Switzerland is one. But no trace has been left this thousand years of the huts which the wandering Irishman and his company erected at St. Gall : whereas St. Emilion's habitation has lasted and will last with the rest of that cliff. Moreover, in succeeding centuries, pious folk emulated his labour and set to hew out beside it—connected with it by a stairway in the rock itself—a church that is like some sea cavern. Seventy feet long, thirty-five feet high, it is divided into three naves by two rows of pillars left in the cutting ; the altar stood away in the dark recesses—surely an impressive place of devotion. It actually served as a parish church till last century ; and the tower outside, opposite the restaurant, was its belfry, built up on the top of the cliff face.

Benedictines finally completed this labour, certainly not till the fourteenth century, for the windows have pointed arches. Religious establishments were numerous in St. Emilion, but have now been demobilised—*désaffectés*. Even the

macaroons, which are one of the town's specialties, are prepared (in the square outside St. Emilion's grotto) according to the recipe of an Ursuline nunnery which no longer exists ; and at the top of the town, built up against the old wall and moat which still surround it, the Monastery of the Cordeliers is now a manufactory of sparkling wine. You can not only visit the very picturesque cloister, but can sit in it at tables and drink Clos des Cordeliers—which goes well with macaroons.

But if you wish to be thoroughly interested and instructed, go to the Eglise Collégiale, now the parish church. The building is a medley of periods from the twelfth century on, and it is worth visiting if only to see how the tall columns by the choir shoot up into groinings of the roof, like the unbroken line of spraying water. But, above all, you will find there a custodian and guide who loves his charge.

There is some trace of the mural paintings which covered the whole church ; but it is only to be seen where some piece of furniture stood against the wall. When the clerics under a restored monarchy got full control, they purified the church after its desecration and were not content with any moral washing by a religious ceremony. All had to be daubed over with whitewash—and so, good-bye to the paintings.

In Praise of France

There is a charming statue of St. Valéry who at St. Emilion is patron of the wine, and has grapes about him. Saint Emilion himself has a fine old statue, of fifteenth-century carving, but it is shoved away in a corner instead of being, where it should, in the votive chapel now consecrated to St. Emilion's dead. It seems the Ministry of the Beaux Arts is hard to move ; and I do not wonder at the curator's impatience, for the statue could be better seen where the parish wants to have it. Here they have devised, perhaps, the most simple and touching war memorial in France : on the flags of the chapel is made the copy of a poilu's grave, with its six foot of dusty earth, and real flowers thrown on it : at the grave's head, a rough, wooden cross is surmounted with a battered helmet. On the wall of the chapel are memorial plaques, some for a son, some for a brother, some for a father. I wish the Beaux Arts would allow St. Emilion to take his place among these simplicities.

St. Emilion in retrospect resolves itself into an impression of little steep streets (one of them, Rue de la Cadène, used to have a chain across its narrow neck) ; of the walk round outside the old fosse and walls, with a view over steep slopes across a valley, all one sheet of vines, autumn-golden ; of the old East gate, sole survivor of war-like days, suddenly silhouetted up against blue sky

at a turn of the path ; of the sense of many things still unexplored after five or six full hours ; and the memory of the best wine I ever knew to be called an ordinaire.

Students of this pleasant subject will perhaps care to know the geographical distribution. All the other great Bordeaux wines are grown along the left bank of the Garonne—which a few miles below Bordeaux becomes the Gironde when the Dordogne joins it. But St. Emilion, being on the north bank of the Dordogne, is divided by two broad tideways and from fifteen to fifty miles of land from the other main districts—of which there are three : the Médoc, yielding red wines ; Sauternes and Barsac, yielding white ; and Graves, yielding both.

The white wine country is up river, facing the Garonne : Médoc stretches seawards along the Gironde : Graves, nearest to the town, lies farther back inland.

Friends in Dublin and London had endowed me with so many introductions to the wine trade in Bordeaux that Monday morning did not suffice to present them ; yet the task was made easy because almost all these merchants have their offices and cellars down on the Quai des Chartrons—opposite to where Atlantic liners lie at the wharf. There is no need to speak French on the Quai des Chartrons ; everybody knows English perfectly,

In Praise of France

and probably German too. This used to be called the Quartier des Etrangers. Bordeaux's export trade was developed by foreigners who came to get for their own peoples the wines which Frenchmen were content to make ; and there was no place where claret had more connoisseurs than in the Hanseatic ports, especially Hamburg and Bremen.

Whoever has been in Bordeaux on such an errand as mine will not need to be told about the hospitality ; whoever has not, will have difficulty in believing that such hospitable people exist. I had difficulty in keeping clear of engagements even for the first day, in which I wanted to look at the town.

Since the *Chapon Fin* was close to my hotel, and since everybody who studies such matters has heard of the *Chapon Fin*, I went to eat there and learnt what a Bordelais chef can do with truffled pasties of game. He convinced me (for the first time) that the French gourmet's passion for the truffle has its justification—though it appears that the perfect moment for this delicacy comes in December : November is the month for truffle-harvest.

The *Chapon Fin* is oddly decorated with concrete, got up to look like rocks ; one seems to be eating in a huge oyster shell. It was entirely beyond my finances for a permanence, but luckily I hit on a little restaurant close to it, called Jane-

Madeleine, which had as pleasant an atmosphere as is to be found in all France. There were no sumptuosities, but excellent food and pleasant waitresses who treated one like an old friend from a second appearance onwards.

Only women servants were in sight ; and the walls were decorated with panels in the Burne-Jones' manner, showing females elegantly employed. But I doubted as to the chef. Yes, she also was a woman. “ On est féministe, ici ? ” “ Yes.” Well, it was certainly none of the Greek-costumed ladies languidly tumbling oranges into baskets who boiled my langouste and sprinkled it with parsley, or roasted a chicken with that finish of perfection.

There was even more of the under-table life than usual ; cats coming and going, anxious to finish the platter which a handsome dog, half collie, half Alsatian, treated with some disdain. Perhaps it is the constant presence of animals that makes French restaurants so friendly and informal.

I owe to Jane-Madeleine, or her handmaidens, the knowledge of a liqueur which it can be no harm to advertise since even Paris does not seem to keep it. It is called the Liqueur du Père Kermann and across the label is written HYGIENE, HYGIENE. Next follows this aphorism :

“ With a sound morality and a reasonable hygiene, man never dies except of old age.”

In Praise of France

Then follow descriptions of the three brands. The first is "essentially a tonic and destined for convalescents and for persons but little accustomed to spirituous drinks." (The English is the label's.) Formula 2 "is more powerful in digestive principle and suits strong temperaments better." Formula 3 "recommends itself to persons desiring a strong stimulative cordial." I can only answer for it that Formula 1 seemed to me the most harmless liqueur I ever tasted—and none the less pleasant; and I see no reason to doubt that the Père Kermann, who is represented on the label as an old bearded monk among his manuscripts and crucibles, was sincerely anxious to promote the health and digestion of mankind. Not for him the scruples and torments of the Reverend Père Gaucher in Daudet's unforgettable story.

Next day began my serious investigations under skilled guidance. I was taken through Messrs. Rosenheim's immense cellars, and one of the first things that caught my attention was men racking a cask. Wine is always drawn off from one cask to another (taking in a little oxygen on its passage, and leaving certain impurities behind it) at the first frost after it is made; at the first shooting of the buds on the vine; at the vine's blossoming; and at the vintage time. Such is the tradition, based on a belief—which has at least some sup-

Vintage Time in Bordeaux

port in fact—that the wine sympathises with the physical history of the stock that bore the grape. After the first year, it may be racked again ; perhaps twice, during its sojourn in cask, which is never less than two years, and for the very strong wines may be five.

Bordeaux's cellars are all masonry, for the town is built on a marsh ; nowhere in the Bordelais does one find wine stored as it is in Champagne and elsewhere in rock cuttings. They use the term *cave* here only for what is underground ; what you enter on the ground level of Bordeaux is the *chai*. One always speaks of the *chais* of Bordeaux.

That afternoon I was taken to the Graves district, which lies nearest to Bordeaux—and it was news to me that the produce of Graves is chiefly red wine. I did however know that one of the four “first growths” was a Graves, grown at the very fringe of Bordeaux ; and Haut Brion was our first objective. There we saw, as the world has been told, new streets and villas springing up on this famous estate—but only on ground that had never grown vines. The vineyards of Château Brion and of La Mission Haut Brion are in no danger.

We went first to La Mission, once the home of some order, and here I saw with emotion the making of the wine for which I have more esteem than any other. It is, as the proprietor said, a very

In Praise of France

simple process. The ox-cart with its two huge tubs, each holding half a ton's weight of grapes, is brought under a wide window where pulleys hoist each tub on to a great table—like a billiard table, but with a gaping hole in it. The purple load is tipped out and a boy standing up shovels the clusters down the hole into a funnel leading to a machine on the lower story. This engine claws apart the stalks from the grapes, throws the stalks into a great bucket, while the fruit is forced by a pump through a long tube, and disgorges itself in a spattering flow into one of the huge vats. It seems to come out liquid ; but move the long pole which is in the vat, and you find it semi-solid. There is no pressing ; such grapes as have come through unbroken will burst during the fermentation of perhaps a fortnight in the vat ; and when that is over the wine will be drawn off into casks.

The stalks, however, are pressed hard ; for they also yield a wine ; but of this poor relation Haut Brion knows nothing.

We crossed from La Mission to the Château Haut Brion itself ; and here also we tasted the wine of the years that were still in cask. I can remember clearly the 1924 and 1925, and cannot swear on my conscience that I could distinguish between the wine of La Mission and of Haut Brion itself—though the latter is what commands the top of the market. But the difference between the two

vintages—both good years—was astonishing. The expert who accompanied me was all for 1924, which is the stronger. I had a leaning to 1925, which recalled the best Haut Brion I have ever drunk (it was in the Friendly Brothers Club in Dublin just after the war, and we thought a bottle apiece not too much for Connaught Rangers). However, there is no pleasure to be got out of tasting great red wines while they are still in the cask ; that conclusion was soon reached. We went to another vineyard far less famous, Château Le Chevalier—but I am told that France esteems it highly. Here was a much better show of grapes than we had yet seen ; but even there the *maître de chai* spoke of half the last year's yield as beyond his reckoning for 1926.

Our road took us now through Pessac, in search of the districts where the white Graves comes from—but suddenly at a turning I cried out to stop the car : the road passed through the ruined yet well preserved remains of a most beautiful old abbey ; and the abbey church was intact. This was the Abbey of Cayac, and it was built on both sides of the road leading from Bordeaux to Spain. In days when the pilgrimage to St. James of Compostella was much in fashion, kings and queens alighted here, and took the common vow to travel the rest of the road on foot in sandals.

Every wise person who sees *coquille St. Jacques*

In Praise of France

on a menu in France knows that it means scollops—and demands it, for few things are more delicious. But do they all remember that a scollop-shell was the pilgrim's badge and that St. Jacques was St. James of Compostella ?

We left this main road just outside Cayac, and presently the sun was setting on our left across a wide valley, or rather depression in the ground, all golden with vines ; a mist began to rise and reddened the sun beyond it ; and in that rich autumn glow we came up to Château Carbonnieux, which is really a château of some antiquity. Here the vineyard was crowded with grape gatherers—the low sun gave them a mellow beauty, which perhaps would have vanished at nearer view.

Our errand was past Carbonnieux to another vineyard, Château du Duc d'Epernon—both are really part of the same property, transmitted from that famous Huguenot leader ; and both, it is said, make really the same wine. Very delicious it was to taste from the cask—white wine becomes drinkable quickly. Later I met it in Paris, matured, of 1915 ; no man need ask for better. The intelligent waiter (at Poccardi's) served it slightly iced, a proper attention to every good white wine of the Bordelais. He added that this particular wine varied greatly from year to year. We did not linger at the little château : the *maître de chai* was anxious to get away punctually at six, for he also

Vintage Time in Bordeaux

has his vine plot, and makes some fifteen *barriques* in the year : most of it for sale : three or four would meet his own needs.

So far as I could make out an acre of vines should produce about ten hogsheads—each of which holds 225 litres. And about three litres to four persons is the average daily consumption in vine-growing France. But the *maître de chai* quoted to me the case of four persons known to him who go through a *barrique* in twenty days. They sing a good deal in the evening but they are up at three in the morning just the same, scraping trees ; for they are *résiniers* (resin-gatherers) ; and they can afford their drink since they earn 150 francs a day each.

Dark was falling now : through the mist in a pasture field where we waited, a shepherd, staff in hand, came walking towards us, his sheep following him in a file ; lovely to see in that greyness, before our motor came and whirled us home.

One thing I had begun to understand that day which the rest of the week made clearer. At Haut Brion a couple of men were busy drawing off from one vat and syphoning the wine into another. They were “equalising” the wine. Every choice vineyard contains several varieties of grape. It is easiest for English readers to put this into terms of gooseberries—which, as we all know, may be red

In Praise of France

or may be green ; but everyone brought up with a garden could name three or four different types of red gooseberry and five or six of green, differing in the size, taste and texture of the berries. It is the same with grapes. The “ Cabernet,” for instance, gives more bouquet and finesse, but a lesser yield ; the “ Malbec,” softness and colour, with abundance ; and the art of vine-growing consists in mixing these varieties skilfully. There is no general formula ; the mixture must be suited to the particular soil and slope. Sometimes, even for claret, a white grape is thrown in with the red. The “ equalising ” means mixing the contents of a vat, which has been filled as the grapes come in from a part of the vineyard planted, say, with Malbec, with those of another where Cabernet has predominated.

All who are interested in wines know that the recognised Bordeaux growths are classified into first, second, and so on down to fifth ; and they may also know that this classification was made in 1855 and is not quite trustworthy. But I, at least, had not realised that after the phylloxera, when replanting had to be done wholesale (about 1880) the old distribution of kinds of grapes was sometimes altered—and sometimes for the worse, sometimes for the better. That is why certain wines have a value in the skilled market that does not answer to their place in the official list, which is

Vintage Time in Bordeaux

concerned only with the red wines—nearly all of them wines of Médoc. To Médoc was my next excursion, with another friendly guide.

Médoc is the tongue of land between the river of Bordeaux and the Atlantic ; but all the wine district lies along the river. Médoc is a rolling plain, not dead flat : and great part of it is *landes*, heath planted with pines. As we ran out from Bordeaux, very soon after we had cleared the suburbs (which stretch far, Bordeaux does not crowd its population) we came upon tracts of this wild country. The river was some distance away on our right and here was richer land under vineyards. But the vines grown by the river bank, though they yield abundantly, give common wine ; the great growths of Médoc lie a mile or two back from the water, where the ground undulates ; and they are not continuous. Pockets of soil determine them, and the first is in the commune of St. Julien, perhaps fifteen miles out. A St. Julien means, of course (in strictness), wine that is grown somewhere in this commune ; but there are eight or ten growths in the commune all of which are St. Julien wines, but are far better known by the names of the châteaux—the three Leovilles, the two Laroses especially.

We ran through St. Julien and into the next commune, which is Margaux ; and again it should be noted that any wine from this area can be sold

In Praise of France

as Margaux, and will probably be very good. But Château Margaux means one of the four "first growths." The famous home of this great wine is nearly opposite to where my host turned in to his father's property, the Château Rauzan-Ségla, a "second growth," attached to this very charming little house, which is now rather a museum than a dwelling. M. Cruze has filled it with works of art, antiquities and curiosities specially belonging to Bordeaux and the Bordelais. I stop to note only two of them : first, the heraldic figure of a leopard which in ancient times was a weathercock over the Château Trompette. Château Trompette was the fortress which stood where is now the great Place des Quinconces between the Bourse and the Quai des Chartrons in Bordeaux ; and the leopard was the leopard of England, for several centuries the device of the English lords of Bordeaux. Finally, under Louis XIII. the Château Trompette was knocked down, and the leopard drifted from one family to another till M. Cruze got him.

The other curio was a group of figures, life size, painted on wood, depicting men and women in the travelling costume of the eighteenth century. Dutch vessels in those days carried on a passenger trade, and when one lay at the wharf ready to sail, if there was not enough fine company on board, these figures on their stands used to be dis-

tributed about the deck to create the impression of a fashionable crowd.

M. Cruze must have great fun out of this large plaything of his ; I never saw a more amusing collection, and much in it was beautiful.

Then we went off to Château Margaux, which is owned by the Rothschilds ; and we were shown the apartment where not so long ago they entertained the Press of all the world with the choice of the world's liquors. In the cellars—which here comprise a great range of bottled wines as well as those in cask—we saw also the section of bottles set apart for the Rothschilds' own use—a number that imagination boggles at. And then we went on from the illustrious commune of Margaux into the even more illustrious Pauillac, which possesses two of the four “first growths.” Here we stopped to lunch at the Château Pontet Canet.

One of the things we had seen at Rauzan-Séglia was a wall, at the entrance to the *chai*, where was inscribed the whole bead-roll of the family marriages—making one feel the friendly and devout veneration of the cellar which exists in a good wine-grower's household. The list was a goodly one, so it was not surprising to meet a sister-in-law as well as a wife at our host's door. Of course they spoke English almost as well as he ; the handsome schoolboy who was running about was too shy to

In Praise of France

try his tongue in it, but he would inevitably grow up with command of it.

There was time before lunch to go and see the winemaking—like what I have already described, with one difference. All the machinery for separating the grapes from the stalks and driving the wine to the vats is quite modern, a labour-saving post-war invention. At Pontet Canet they need to save labour like the rest ; but they do not like the idea of tubes, and so the separating machine is set up on the big table which receives the grapes ; the stalks are flung aside, but the juice and skins run out on to the wooden table with its six-inch rim ; and on each side is a slide which can be drawn back to make an opening corresponding to a hole in the floor, under which is a vat on the ground floor. The table is on rails and there are half a dozen holes in the floor on each side of the rail—and a dozen vats underneath ; so by the simplest adjustments the wine runs through to the wood, having touched nothing but wood.

From the cellar we passed to look in at the kitchen where three or four comely, jolly-looking women were getting ready the workers' evening soup. A smell that would make a hermit greedy went up from the big cauldron in which the *bouilli* was simmering ; elsewhere was a huge mess of tomatoes cooking. A dancing place also is provided in this particular establishment.

Pontet Canet is classified as one of the “fifth growths.” The vineyard lies exactly between those of Latour and Lafite—both of them first growths—divided off only by paths for the oxen and wine carts ; and its yield is about the same as theirs in quantity. I ciphered it out that on an average year Pontet Canet would be able to give one day’s moderate drinking—a litre apiece—to the quarter of a million inhabitants of Bordeaux. It is undoubtedly one of the wines which rank higher than its classification on the market. I have just been reading a book about Charles de Foucauld, the hermit of the Sahara, and his biographer remarks that his days as a cavalry officer were much given to provision of “Cortons and Pontet Canets”; so M. René Bazin at least regards it as a type of the choicer wines. But for all that, some queer kink of soil has settled that Lafite shall be able to do what Pontet Canet cannot ; that is admitted. Yet in my stay at Bordeaux I was given to drink an august wine—Lafite of 1893—and after thirty-six hours had the chance to compare it with a Pontet Canet of 1878.

It is the fact that I remember now more definitely and sharply the taste of the Lafite ; no other wine known to me has so much individual character. The Pontet Canet lingers in my thoughts only as a perfect suavity—and a suavity at its perfec-

In Praise of France

tion. Our host was right, I have no doubt, in saying that this was only possible because it had never been moved.

Other things apart, had not a stranger cause to be uplifted by that compliment ? Here was an exquisite creation, vintaged while I was still a schoolboy, offered to me by hosts, neither of whom was born until that wine was already mellow in bottle. Lucky people to have such a thing to give —and to give it with the special charm of giving it where it belonged by Nature.

A good many of these Bordeaux wine-merchants are like M. Cruze in this, that they combine wine trading with wine growing ; and it seems to me a very delightful blend ; the wholesale dealer is also something of the farmer and something of the manufacturer. Cooperage comes into it as well as wine-making and wine trading ; and the staff of Pontet Canet must be pretty considerable : it drinks 265 hogsheads of wine each year ! One drawback, however, to this combination of capacities is that a man is constantly racing from town to country and back, and M. Cruze had various questions submitted for his decision while we were at lunch. One of them was puzzling :

“ What are we going to do about this annoying Reine des Reines ? ”

Naturally, I asked for information, and the story developed.

All through France there has grown up a custom of choosing a Reine or Queen of Beauty for the town, the commune, the department, and so on (according to many French critics it is mostly an “*affaire de politique*” and the electoral services of relatives weigh heavy in the choice). Then there is a further competition between all the “Reines” of the season for the one who shall be “Reine des Reines.” The year the choice fell upon a young woman of Arcachon—said to be a *sardinière*, working at fish-curing ; she received the prize, some thousands of francs, and was whisked off to Paris and to Brussels, and so forth, to be photographed and looked at. But before these promotions fell upon her she, with the rest of her family, had engaged to go vintaging at Pontet Canet ; and in October she with the family duly appeared. But, having appeared, she announced that she was not going to work : it was not compatible with her position. Meanwhile journalists from Bordeaux dashed out to interview this Royalty among the vines and write about her ; she had leisure to be looked at. It is certain that our hosts were no way delighted by the distinction which had been conferred on them : she was drawing her rations and drawing her pay ; and the effect might not be good for the discipline of the other workers. I am not sure that they did not resent my amusement. But when I asked if I

In Praise of France

also could see the beauty, they sent out a message. Answer came, that she would need half an hour to make herself ready.

I do not know what M. Cruze's rank was in the war ; he had had four years and a half, leaving him with three wounds to show for it (and the Legion of Honour and the Croix de Guerre) ; but at that message he looked like a commanding officer about to explode. However, he agreed that the Royalty was playing her part perfectly, and we lingered over coffee and then sallied forth with a battery of cameras to where a stout, dumpy peasant woman stood, and a little boy of fourteen. For the entire family had stayed in from work to assist in the toilette ; and presently forth came a great strapping wench, with strong, white teeth, black hair, big black eyes and rather high colour for that Spanish type. She moved awkwardly, a self-conscious hoyden ; there was not a trace of charm about her ; but she was undoubtedly a fine thing, though the thin silk dress, the silk stockings, and the absurd shoes were unsuited to her at any time, and doubly absurd when she was by way of vintaging. The gold earrings and necklace and armlet, which were part of the prize, looked less incongruous on her darkness ; but I should like much better to have seen her unadorned among her sardine tubs.

We went out then among the vines to see where

Vintage Time in Bordeaux

the workers were busy. Nearly all of them came from Arcachon, and the big old woman who seemed to be gang leader was in trousers, to move more freely among the vines. But there was no time to stay ; our host just asserted his presence, passed the time of day, asked if the soup was all right ; and then we went on to our last visit to Château Lafite—than which there is nothing greater in the world of wines. Here was a crowd ; for all the agents of the wine from all over the world had been brought as the firm's guests—sixty or seventy of them in great brakeloads. The chief proprietor pointed me to one man. “ He is important ; he represents Cuba.” For a moment I did not understand ; then I realised that Cuba now in this connection means all the United States of America—who if they want to drink decently find Cuba the nearest club. Bootleggers do not traffic in Lafite.

This showing round of visitors at vintage time is a sort of annual *corvée* ; and I suppose the Bordelais have learnt the great art of seeming glad to do it. Certainly our host of that day had the art to a degree almost unbelievable in so busy a man, and Pontet Canet will be always associated for me with a most charming memory of French hospitality. Besides, it is always pleasant to talk to an able man on his own subject ; and there is no pleasanter subject than wine.

In Praise of France

I had another view of it next day when I was taken into the Sauternes district which lies also near the river, but not on the river, and upstream not downstream from Bordeaux. Our guide of this day was M. René Calvet, and he made me observe that whereas the left bank of the Garonne and Gironde sloped gently to the water, steep *coteaux* were opposite them ; and on these much wine is grown, some of it good wine, especially at points opposite to the famous vineyards of the left bank—as if a seam of good soil here crossed the river. It happens so opposite to Pauillac ; and opposite to Sauternes he showed me a spire on the hills—Sainte Croix du Mont, whose wine I had liked so much at Périgueux.

It is a very small district of the Bordelais that concentrates in itself the best white wines. We came into it at Barsac. And from Barsac on were fine vineyards, yet not, as in the Médoc, all bearing the names of châteaux. It is country where an established wine merchant can easily maintain what is a brand rather than a vintage—a standardised wine. He selects, say, the wine of one estate in a good year to put it on the market with a fancy name, which is not the name of any vineyard. Next year and the year after he may supply from the same source—but if that vineyard has a bad season, he buys elsewhere the nearest thing to his type that is procurable. But this, of course, involves

buying after the wine is made—perhaps even after it has developed. Wine is sold both ways. While I was in Bordeaux that year's crop of Cheval Blanc, another small and much reputed growth of St. Emilion, was sold by auction, before the grapes were yet in the vat.* The buyer no doubt had his sound reasons, as a publisher has when he buys a story of Mr. Kipling's before he has seen it ; but he is buying a name. In any year no one can be certain how a wine will turn out ; but in 1926 the gamble was greater than usual. I had supposed that the shortness of crop caused by the lack of rain would be compensated by the excellence of the wine ; but that, it appears—though possible—is no way certain. In the red wine it may lead to too much harshness ; in both red and white there is danger lest the excess of sugar may spoil the whole. For if the alcohol fails in a certain time to assimilate the sugar, as it normally does in fermentation, the sugar is prone to fall to the bottom and the wine to go sour.

These matters of chemistry are really beyond me ; but I understood the surprising story of

* One of the amusements attaching to a journey like this, comes afterwards, when you try to follow up the bowing acquaintances you have formed. At a restaurant in Soho, which had just been taken on by an old friend, I was looking on the wine list and saw "Cheval Blanc 1914." When I enquired, M. Gustave's face fell. "That is a mistake," he said, and promptly scratched out the figure opposite and doubled it. Someone had just told him that "Cheval Blanc of 1914" was un procurable, and much demanded by experts. I got my bottle, though, at the unrevised price.

In Praise of France

Château Yquem. The vineyard, owned by the Comtes de Lur Saluzes, always produced a famous wine : but it was made after the usual fashion, till in the last century a strike took place on the estate, and before it was over the grapes on the vines were all withered and shrivelled. When at last labour was available the owner said : " This year is lost but let us give it a trial " ; and they stripped the unsightly clusters and pressed the juices out of them. A couple of years later the Russian Grand Duke Michael came to the Bordelais and for a curiosity was given this wine to taste, which had already developed the character now everywhere associated with it. Its sweetness and strength, combined with that scented bouquet, so enchanted the Russian that he bought the whole yield ; the fashion was established, and since then not only in Yquem but in the vineyards adjoining every grape that would seem fit to eat is rejected. All must undergo that withering on the vine which is called politely *la pourriture noble*.

I saw the unhandsome material first at Château Suduiraut : bunches were piled up, going into the machine which tears out the stalks. A few grapes here and there retained their shape and plumpness. At Château Yquem, said our guide, all those would be picked off by hand and kept out.

Château Suduiraut, as I have drunk it, was more like a Madeira than a French wine ; and all the

Sauternes pressed from decayed grapes tend to become *madérés* : but the French count this a fault. The red wine, with which the skin is allowed to ferment, takes longer to become palatable, but it can never degenerate into a sort of liqueur, as these Sauternes may. Yet at their best they have a keenness and freshness of flavour like that of a perfect fruit—no matter how mellow age has made them. I was given in Bordeaux a Château d'Arche of 1904, and it really did “taste of Flora and the country green.” Nothing more exquisite to go with dessert could be imagined. My hostess specially enjoined upon me that I should drink it with her peaches served in the creamiest cream cheese I ever encountered.

We went into Château Suduiraut not only for the sake of the wine but for the lovely place. It is a modest French mansion in the taste of Louis XIV., admirable in proportion ; but its glory is the garden or *parc*, designed by Lenôtre. He had taken five or six acres of ground, enclosed them with a wall, planted them with trees. “ You shall not know there is a vineyard near you,” he said ; and he laid out symmetrical sheets of water, beyond which were noble cedars (he may even have introduced a breed of kingfishers, for one flashed blue across). And from the farther edge of the water, alleys radiated out in such a fashion that one really had the impression of being in a

In Praise of France

forest. But, as we came away, a Swiss agent, who was with us, looked in a puzzled way at this patch of timber. "Why don't they cut down those trees and plant vines there?" he said. For this was in the very cream of the country, just near the village of Sauternes ; and a long gentle slope took us up to Château Yquem—no longer inhabited ; but it was evidently once a great place, first a fortress, then a habitation. From outside we had a superb view over all this district—vines covering every inch of it ; and to our right we looked over the long curves of the Garonne and the *coteaux* beyond. In the yard was the usual *chai*, with the press working ; all white wines must, of course, be pressed, as no skins go into the vat. The *maître de chai* brought us out glasses of the three last vintages, 1923 to 1925. All were clear as crystal and all were delicious ; but the differences between them not at all so marked as in the red wines. Then M. Calvet took a glass and put it under what ran from the press. "Taste the 1926 now," he said laughing. It was a horrible fluid, muddy and greenish, like the water of a foul puddle. No wonder friends of mine say that in fermentation a wine cleanses itself of all impurities, and condemn port because brandy, thrown in to check the fermentation, stops this cleansing.

From there we went to Château Filhot, where the Comte de Lur Saluzes lives—a house in the

style of Louis XVI., surrounded by a *parc anglais* in the taste of Horace Walpole—and again the Swiss cried out at the waste of precious ground. On that golden afternoon, it seemed absurd that any vineyard owner should not wish to look out on his grapes ; but the truth is that for most part of the year a vineyard has no beauty—and least of all here in the Bordelais where each vine is trimmed exactly to the same pattern : no spreading or straying for them. From Château Filhot we went to Château Vigneau, near which again is Château d'Arche, and where we went we tasted the wines of the same years, and all were delicious—all prepared in the same way. Yet a cask of any of these will be worth perhaps one-third of what Yquem fetches. I am prepared to believe a great expert who told me that Yquem is undoubtedly the best ; but the difference of price is fantastic and a matter of fashion.

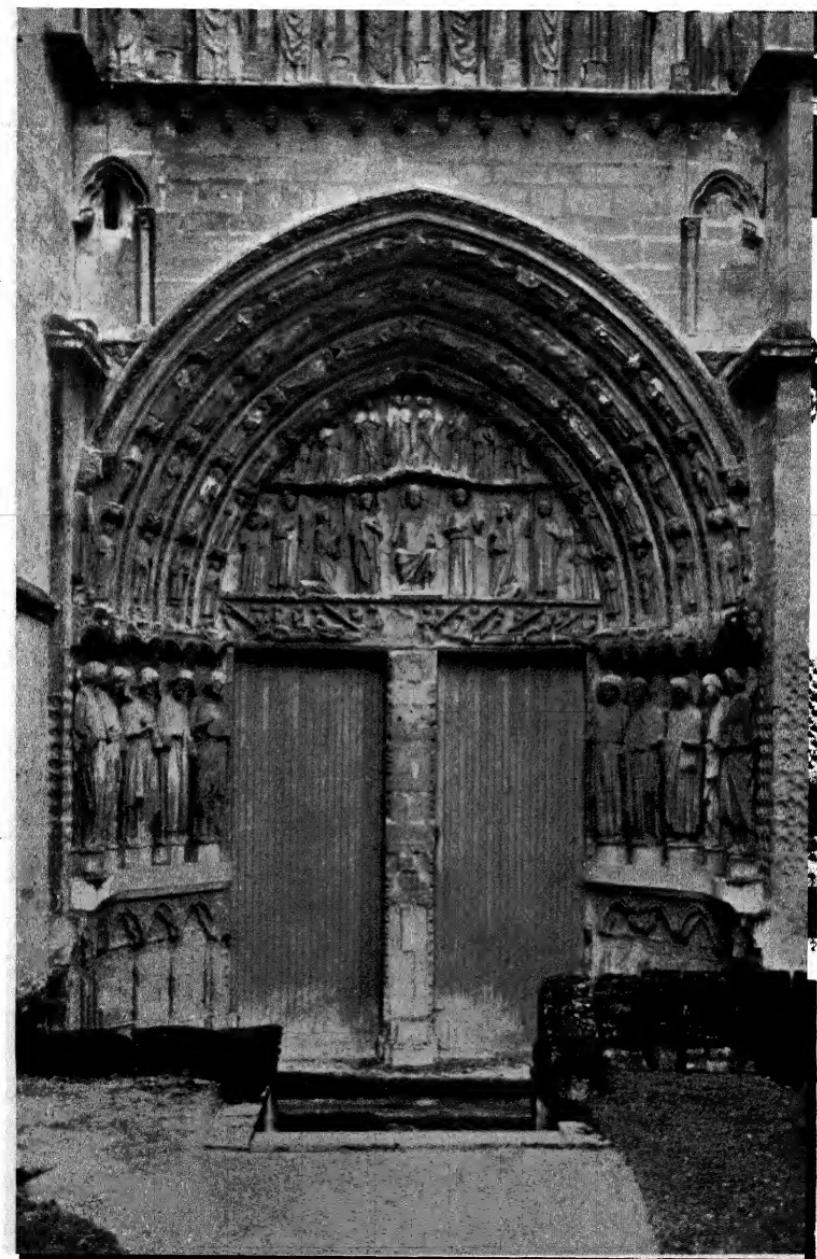
Among the crowd of us there was a wine broker who told me that the difference had increased in the last years, especially since the growth of 1921, which has acquired a fabulous reputation. Yet when that wine was first put on the market no one would buy it, till at last M. Calvet bought up the whole—paying 2,000 francs a tun more than he need have paid. To have bought at the lower price would have been to let down the reputation of the wine. Since then its value has multiplied at

In Praise of France

least twentyfold ; but his son is of opinion that Château Vigneau in particular is just as good a wine—though few people in England have heard the name.

Why we do not sometimes, at least, in England drink these wines instead of port with dessert is a mystery to me ; above all, after lunch, when a sleepy drink is far from desirable. They can, of course, be imported without the least need of any extra alcohol to make them stand the journey.

I came back from that outing with a head more than ever crowded—for M. Calvet had many interests beside wine. At Barsac he took me in to look at the church built in the time of Louis XIII., an untouched example of what he called the *style Jésuite*. He admitted its pomposity, but it pleased his French mind just because it had a style and was consistently of a style. He wanted me to go and look at a good example of the same style near the Library in Bordeaux—and I had not time. But he made sure that at least I should not miss the cathedral, for he rushed me in there for five minutes on our way back. Wonderful it was in the half light, for the choir rises higher than the nave, and its crowding columns looked like a forest at nightfall. We stopped outside the main doorway, for him to show me what is unique in France—the single figure of a Pope, sculptured with his attendant bishops on each side. That was Bertrand de Got,



[Gourdin, Bordeaux]

PORTE ROYALE IN THE CATHEDRAL, BORDEAUX

who, as Clement V., brought the Papacy to Avignon—a proceeding which orthodox Catholic historians do not praise. But Bordeaux is constant to the memory of this great archbishop who gave special indulgences to the craftsmen then (in 1306) busy in erecting the forest of towering arches which make the cathedral's choir, and who let the town off large arrears of taxes—for the archbishops of Bordeaux were among the greatest lords territorial. But Bordeaux's Gascon Pope is even more fitly commemorated than by this statue. At Pessac is a vineyard which ranks next to Haut Brion among the red wines of Graves : it was Bertrand de Got's property, and the wine it yields is famous everywhere as *Pape Clément*.

To the right of this main doorway is another, opening on to the nave, and not less richly ornamented ; but the access to it is barred from without by a *grille* and within is blocked by a pulpit ; for this doorway has lost its uses. It was the Porte Royale, through which the kings of England made their entry to the cathedral of the capital city of Aquitaine—their own town. For Edward II., by special decree, attached the commune of Bordeaux to the English crown ; if it were transferred to any, it might be only to the king's heir, as it was later, to the Black Prince. Therewith went great privileges for Bordeaux, acknowledged at the time by a grant in money, and by a thousand tuns of wine ;

In Praise of France

but the acknowledgment is perpetuated in Bordeaux's coat of arms. The royal city had the right to close its gates on all—even on the king himself ; and when a king of England sailed to Bordeaux he landed opposite on the right bank, at his castle on the *coteau* of Lormont. Next day his coming was announced by herald to the Mayor of Bordeaux, by whose order the gates were closed with ceremony. The royal suite took boat across the river, landed on the quay ; and then the mayor, opening the great gate, came out with his burgesses in full array and led in the king.

That is why in the centre of the coat of arms, which you may see set up at all the tramway halts (a good decorative touch), the centre of the shield represents a strong gate. Over it is the royal crown and the heraldic leopard — England's badges.

If one wishes to know how England held for so long this far-out inheritance, the answer is that these Plantagenet rulers made the towns their friends everywhere. They gave Dublin the rights of Bristol—and it was enough to keep Dublin constantly loyal to them. But they gave Bordeaux the rights of London, and for more than a century the Bordelais fought time and again against all attempts to bring them directly under the crown of France. At last, when Jeanne d'Arc's crusade had won out (years after Joan's body was cinders),

Dunois laid siege to Bordeaux and there was nothing for it but submission. Yet even then, after the negotiation was ended, the herald of Bordeaux went out on to the quay and blew ceremonially three trumpet calls, summoning the lords of Bordeaux to the rescue. Then, and only then, when no ship of England appeared to answer, was the surrender completed ; and Dunois marched in to take possession.

They leave out the leopard now on some of the shields. But I saw it painted full and large on the flank of a great lorry standing outside the main post office of Bordeaux.

Bordeaux's special loyalty was not solely due to the wisdom of these oversea monarchs in making large concessions to municipal pride. England tried to hold Poitiers the same way, but failed—centuries earlier than 1453, when Bordeaux was finally lost. But Bordeaux had a priceless market in England which grew no wines ; in France its vintages met competition everywhere ; and from the first the wine trade was Bordeaux's great interest. When the city was divided against itself, the Coloms, head of one faction, were wine merchants, and they were the English party.

The immense organisation of Bordeaux's special commerce might be expressed by statistics as to the quantities of wine held on the Quai de Chartrons and the adjoining Cours du Médoc. I have

In Praise of France

not them to give ; but it may suffice to describe a great establishment which has grown up quite recently at the other end of the long quays—half an hour by tram from the Chartrons.

The grandfather of M. Descas was a cooper who went into wine trading. At the end of a certain period, as his commerce grew, he found himself renting or owning sixty-five cellars scattered over Bordeaux. So he built with Napoleonic completeness and the structure towers up there. It runs back a great way, and is divided symmetrically into strips about the size of a lawn tennis court : sixteen of these strips on each floor—forty-eight cellars in all. Two-thirds of the whole are in white wine—this firm specialises in white. The new wine, run in from the quay by rails, is lifted to the third story ; in its evolution through various rackings it is piped to vats on the second floor, then to the first ; finally, when ready for export, it is lying on the ground floor, by the rails. Altogether an amazing piece of constructive organisation.

I had the feeling that the M. Descas of to-day was even more interested in organisation than in wine. There is no mistaking a man in whom the directing energy is a passion : and he at least does not lack means to gratify it. Somehow in talk there cropped up the case of the *résiniers* and their 150 francs a-day. “ I should like you to see all that,” he said ; and so it was settled that I should go with

him to the commune of Audenge, where he has a house on the Bay of Arcachon, in the heart of the Landes, and is Mayor of the commune.

The magnificent road, noticeably straight even for a French road, runs broad and asphalted : Arcachon is the seaside playground of Bordeaux. Soon we were among heath and pines, and as the forest thickened, wide belts ran through it, clear of timber. "Fire is our great trouble," my host said. Along the road were houses scattered here and there ; but to each side, trees and trees, nothing but trees ; scarcely a house in miles. This is one of the loneliest regions in all France, and it used to be the most miserable. Even at the turn of the century people in it lived on bread and water ; no wine was used in the district (this to a Gascon seems the last word of poverty). In each house there used to hang by a cord from the rafter a piece of rolled ham—the *chichoun*. As the family ate, each one rubbed his piece of loaf on this ; that was the kitchen to their meal. (In Ireland it used to be "Potatoes and point"—a salt herring hung there and they pointed the potato.) "When I was shooting as a boy, and got hungry," M. Descas said, "if I went into a house, I asked for bread : that was all they could have ; and when I was given it I rubbed it on the *chichoun*, because that was the usage." Yet for the last fifteen years, but specially since the war, timber and resin have come

In Praise of France

into such demand that these same people are among the most prosperous in France ; far better off than the *vignerons* of the wine country. We turned off the main road at right angles and reached a dense belt of pines, twelve miles long ; then turned left on a newly made road and came to a village growing up, and a school ; some of the children come five or six miles to it ; but there is now a village, a road, a post office and a telephone (useful for fire alarms : every here and there are seen small tracts ravaged by fire). All this development is paid for by the commune. Along the road we saw pine trees, some drained wholly of their sap and marked for cutting (the timber is none the worse). Some had six, seven, eight little cups on them ; these were being drained out ; but the young tree in full resin bearing would have not more than two. M. Descas showed me one. “ That tree’s resin is worth forty francs a year, twenty to the *résinier*, twenty to the proprietor.” The commune owns 600,000 trees : that is how it pays for its improvements. M. Descas owns nearly as many, and as Mayor directs the exploitation of his own and the commune’s.

Making the incisions to the exact depth which gives flow of sap and does not hurt the tree is skilled work ; so is all the adjustment of cups and of leads into them ; and the skilled man knows at a glance when a tree is running dry. Forestry

here is an inherited skill. Most of the timber goes for pit props to England : the people of the Landes, very uneducated folk, probably assume that trees will not grow there. They would naturally suppose that other countries exploit their resources—as France does.

I saw another illustration of this at Audenge. On this side of the bay used to be salt ponds ; the tide was let in to a great system of cuttings in the salt marsh. This way of getting salt has been superseded by the development of transport which makes rock salt everywhere available, and the whole system of ponds with its sluices was derelict when someone had the idea of using it for a fish farm. And so, arrangements like salmon weirs are put on the gates so that the fish coming up with the incoming tide can enter but cannot get out. We went down and as the motor drove along the broad sea dyke the canal-like stretches of water inside it were all dimpled with the play of mullet. Bass are there too. It is simple to drive the fish into one stretch of canal and net them out. Then in autumn, when the eels run to the sea, sluices are opened by night and bagnets fill with them ; and there are boxes to keep them in alive. We catch some of our eels even in Ireland—and England will use them. But who in Ireland or England would bother about bass and mullet ?

It is, however, only right to say that M. Descas

In Praise of France

does not find this a very profitable business. He owns it, being a sort of Marquis de Carabbas ; he owns also a big vineyard somewhere up on the Garonne, and directs a big farm somewhere in the department of the Lot—inland from Bordeaux—a department which nowadays has a vast deal of foreigners in it—largely Italians. They are probably the making of a good French stock ; France has a great faculty of absorption.

What, after all, is France ? Plenty of English names—and Irish—may be seen over the establishments in Bordeaux and in the names of vintages. Johnson, Barton, Kirwan—and, of course, Hennessy, though that belongs rather to the Cognac district. Out of our northern islanders the South of France has made good Frenchmen. Mediterranean peoples should be even more easily assimilated. I found M. Descas speaking highly of the Portuguese as workmen (and not at all so highly of the Spaniards).

How close the Gascon type conforms to the southern I had seen in the Reine des Reines at Pontet Canet. That lady was, I believe, of Spanish blood. But at Audenges I saw something much rarer. As we stood on the sea dyke, boats were busy fishing outside and I could not understand their manœuvres, till we went up to the little port and saw one of these boats just landed with a sack of the oysters they had been dredging.

Vintage Time in Bordeaux

Another boat was coming up the creek ; dead low tide, only a trickle of water ; in the bow a girl was poling the craft, making a graceful, slender, bare-legged silhouette against the mudbanks opposite. Amidships a man sat on the thwart beside his net full of oysters ; and in the stern a huge old woman steered, with wide bonnet and some kind of untidy blouse ; but below the waist her garment was a portentously wide pair of scarlet trousers, cut off at the knee. I went back to look at this strange figure landing, and it was then I saw the girl's profile. Pure Greek, the forehead and nose making one perfect line, with the least suggestion of indentation where the eyebrows crossed ; the strong line from chin to ear in complete harmony with this austere beauty. I had seen the like painted on Tanagra vases but never worn on mortal shoulders. As she headed the boat in, one got the full face : great dark eyes, a skin with no redness in it, but the exquisite white bloom of a sand rose. If the judges at Arcachon passed by this loveliness to award the palm to that strapping *sardinière* I have no opinion of them. I hope my memory will never lose the image of that exquisite Mediterranean beauty. No wonder troubadours were plenty in Gascony.

A French engineer from Havre, who talked to me on my journey home, said that for him the south began at Poitiers. I could not myself feel that the

In Praise of France

Poitevins were any more people of the Midi than the Tourangeaux ; and I saw nothing of the legendary southern gesticulation and vehemence in Périgord ; as for Bordeaux, I simply felt there that I was among very able Frenchmen. Bordeaux, according to my engineer, is specially anxious not to be considered as part of the Midi. Yet Bordeaux is in Gascony, and if the Gascon is not a Southern, who is, in France ? And why should they dislike to own up to it ? There are the innuendoes attaching, in French as in English, to the word *gasconade*. But there are also the realities. D'Artagnan was a reality in fact before he became so much more real in fiction. And D'Artagnan did nothing so surprising in fact or in fiction as the other Gascon, Bernadotte, who, after spending ten years in the ranks of Louis XVI.'s Army, helped to throw Europe into Napoleon's crucible and then, breaking away from Napoleon, went off to the Scandinavian north and founded one of the dynasties (you can almost count them on the fingers of one hand) which was able to last out the European War. Gascons are people who do big things.

What must strike any observer among these big business men of Bordeaux is that trade and industry have never divorced them from the land. M. Descas was only the extreme case ; every one that I met was somehow or other directing culture of

the soil, not as a hobby nor to have the name of a landowner, but as an essential part of his life's work. And one of them said to me that wherever you go in France you find this contact with the land. Nearly every workman or clerk in the cities has somewhere a household on the land to which he is related, and with which he keeps touch. In that, I think, lie both the charm and the strength of France.

I learnt also in Bordeaux this curious fact—that when the war time made money plenty in France, Frenchmen everywhere expressed their desire for a heightened standard of living in the same way. They drank better wines—the wines that they had always desired to drink. The result is that Bordeaux was almost drunk dry. The Americans undoubtedly helped, for they had quantities of money and were in great numbers at Bordeaux ; but it was the French who really exhausted all of the famous vintages. In one great cellar I was told : “There are half a million bottles here—there should be a million and a half.” No merchant in Bordeaux has the old wines in any profusion. One man in the trade wanted Brane Contenac of 1899, and went to another who had it on his list. The friend laughed. “Do you know what I have. Three cases.” They went into the matter and concluded that the entire trade in Bordeaux could muster perhaps two or three hundred bottles of that par-

In Praise of France

ticular wine. The practical bearing of this seems to be that Bordeaux is trying to develop the demand for white wines, which attain maturity if not perfection in a few years. Those of 1921 are famous. But I was given a St. Emilion of 1916 and it was not yet a "*vin fait.*"

Unhappily France at large has no chance at present to be lavish in outlay, so the red wine stocks will get a chance to accumulate. Nobody need fear that names which have grown famous through the centuries will slip out of the world's memory. For there have been two ways, and only two, discovered to make the name of a little place world famous, and one is accomplished in the hazard and destruction of a few hours : the other takes long generations—centuries even—of happy and beneficent labour. Crécy, Blenheim, Austerlitz, Waterloo—these have their immortality ; so have St. Julien, Margaux, St. Emilion and Sauternes. Leaving prohibitionists and pacifists in their own limbo, which of the two fames would a man desire for his birthplace ? The answer will be surer if you go to a battlefield and see what your journey brings you, and then make your pilgrimage devoutly—as I did—to some of these little daughters of Bordeaux—these brilliants in the crown of Aquitaine. In the one case you may evoke a memory—but the more you know the less you will care to picture the reality. In the other

Vintage Time in Bordeaux

you will find a glory sedulously cherished and maintained which every year its inheritors hope and labour to make more glorious than ever it was in the past.

INDEX

- AIN, the, 110
Almanach des Gourmands,
194 et seq.
Ambérieu, 101
Amboise, 17
Ancourt, 95
Angers, 45–55
Antony, Mark, 181
Aquitaine, 220, 249
Arques, *84 et seq.*
Artemare, 134
Audenge, 289
Ausonius, 249–250
Auxerre, 15
Avallon, 3
- BARSAC, 276, 292
Beaujeu, 147
Belley, 100, 114 *et seq.*
Black Prince, 221
Blois, 16
Boar hunting, 141, 172
Boeldieu, restaurant, 74
Bons, nuns of, 215
Bordeaux, 220–221, 249 *et seq.*
English names in, 291
relations with England, 285
Bouillabaisse, 162, 188
Boulogne, 60
Bourdeille, 245
Bourg, 100 *et seq.*
Brantôme, 242–248
Pierre de, 243
Brenne, the, 20 *et seq.*
Bresse, 100–112
- Brillat-Savarin, 99, 114, 126,
134, 193, 206–215, 219
Brou, église de, 106
Bugey, 100
- CAREME and George IV.,
204
Cayac, Abbey of, 263
Champagne, 205
Chapon Fin, 258
Chauvigny, 226–228
Chestnuts, 169, 174
Clain, the, 225, 232
Clos Normand, 74 *et seq.*
Cointreau, 53
Collobrières, 164–174
Coquille St. Jacques, 263
Cork trees, 169, 173
Couronnement at Fougères,
35–36
Crémière, M. et Mme., xii, xiii
Cuba, 275
Culoz, 100, 137, 215
Cussy, Marquis de, 203
- DAUDET, Alphonse, 150, 168
Dieppe, 71–74, 87–89, 139
Dol, 29 *et seq.*
Dordogne, the, 233, 248, 251
Draguignan, 180
Dreyfus affair, xvi
Dronne, the, 232
Dumas père, 50
- ECREVISSES, 103, 215
Eleanor of Aquitaine, 12, 49,
220

Index

Entre-deux-Mers, 251
Epine de vinette, 111
Esterel, the, 174
Etaples, 61

FATNESS, 214
Fillioux, la Mère, 189
Fishing, xix, 4, 7, 35, 38, 48,
73, 82, 110, 129, 140, 153
Fishponds, 289
Forest of Fougères, 40 *et seq.*
Forestry, 27
Forêt d'Arques, 81
Fougères, 35, 44

GARDENER at Martin Eglise,
93 *et seq.*
Garonne, 248, 257
Gassin, 177-178
Gastronomy, development of,
193 *et seq.*
Gien, 15
Gisors, 139 *et seq.*
Graves, 257
Graveyard, native Labour
Corps, 97
Greece, influence of, 182, 291
Grimaud, 179-181
Grimod de la Reynière, 193
et seq.

HENRY II. of England, 12, 49,
220
Henry IV. of Navarre, 77
Hotels—
Angers : Voyageurs, 54 ;
Cheval Blanc, 53
Avallon : Chapeau Rouge,
5
Belley : Pernollet, 116
Bourg : Europe, 103
Dol : Grand Maison, 31

Hotels—*contd.*

Fougères : Moderne, 54
Gisors : Trois Poissons, 139
Martin Eglise : Clos Nor-
mand, 14
Montreuil : de France, 61
Périgueux : de Périgord,
233

JOAN of Arc, 77, 221

LA FOUX, 175, 177, 179
La Garde, 154-156
La Garde Freinet, 176
Lamartine, 136
Landes, the, 287 *et seq.*
Lavaret (pollen), 120
Le Mans, 44, 55-58
Lepidus, 181
Liqueurs—
Cointreau, 53
Fenouillet, 172
Guignolet, 53
invention of, 192
Père Kermann, 259
Lyon, 188-190

MARSEILLES, 182-188
Martin Eglise, 74 *et seq.*
Maurin des Maures, 166, 177
Menagerie, 145
Messire, M., xvi
Montagné, Prosper, 219
Montreuil-sur-Mer, 59-70
Moors, the, 155, 174-176
Mountains of the Moors, 155,
175

Mulberries, 178
Mushrooms, 112

ORLEANS, 15-16
Oxen, 124

Index

PAILLASSONS, 94
Pape Clement, 283
Pepper, 192
Périgueux, 233 *et seq.*
Pernollet, M., 115-20, 137,
 219
Photography, xxi-xxii
Physiologie du Goût, 206, 211
Poitiers, 220-224
Pontet Canet, 270 *et seq.*
Poulard, Mère, 33
Prusse, La Mère, 134
Pugieu, 127, 208

RÉBIÈRE, 103
Reine des Reines, 273
Rennes, 33-35
Resin gathering, 169, 286-288
Restaurants—
 Angers : Entr'acte, 53
 Belley : Pernollet, 115 *et seq.*
 Bordeaux : Chapon Fin,
 258
 Jane Madeleine,
 259
 Bourg : Rébière, 103
 Dieppe : Boeldieu, 74
 Le Mans : Central, 55
 Lyons : La Mère Fillioux,
 189
 Marseilles : Pascal, 188
 Martin Eglise : Clos Nor-
 mand, 74-76
 Paris : Montagne, 219
 Toulon : Jull, 162
 Grand Cerf, 163
 Virieu de Grand : Oster-
 tag, 100, 112
Revolution, social effects of,
 193, 195
Richard, Cœur de Lion, 57
Rouff and Curnonsky (*La
France Gastronomique*), xxi,
 101, 187, 233

SABOT making, 40
St. Austreberthe, 65
St. Emilion, 249, 252-256
St. Père, 13
St. Porchère, 222
St. Radegonde, 223
St. Sauve, 65, 70
St. Savin, 225, 228-231
St. Serge at Angers, 58
St. Tropez, 175, 177
Sarrasin, 39
Senegalese, 159
Suffren, 176
Syndicat d'Initiative, xxii

TAPESTRIES at Angers, 46
Tendret, Lucien, 215-219
Toulon, xviii, 150-163, 187
Touraine, xii-xvi, 20 *et seq.*
Touring Club de France, xxi
Truffles, 213, 241
Turkeys, 213

VALLIERE, Louise de la, 20
Valromey, 136
Vauban, 5, 63
Vezelay, 9-12, 63, 64
Vienne, The, 226, 232
Vintages, 251
Virieu le Grand, 100, 112
Vitre, 35, 144
Voltaire, 194
Vouvray, 220

WALNUTS, crop, 247
Wine, Montesquieu on, 217
Wine-making, 22-23, 50, 260,
 265, 270, 277, 293, 297
Wines of—
 Anjou, 35, 45, 49-52
 Bordeaux, 257
 Bugey, 131, 138

Index

Wines of—*contd.*

- Burgundy, 138, 189
- Champagne, 205
- Graves district, 257
 - Carbonnieux, 264
 - Duc d'Epernon, 264
 - Haut Brion, 261 *et seq.*
 - Le Chevalier, 263
 - Pape Clément, 283
- Medoc District, 257, 267
 - Lafite, 271, 275
 - Margaux, 268
 - Pauillac, 269
 - Pontet Canet, 270 *et seq.*
 - Rauzan-Ségla, 268
 - St. Julien, 267
- Montbazillac, 242

Wines of—*contd.*

- St. Emilion District, 256 *et seq.*
 - Ausone, 250
 - Cheval Blanc, 277
- Sauternes District, 257, 276
 - D'Arche, 279, 281
 - Filhot, 281
 - Ste. Croix du Mont, 234, 276
 - Suduiraut, 279
 - Vigneau, 281–282
 - Yquem, 278, 280
- Toulon, 162
- Vouvray, 19–23, 220

